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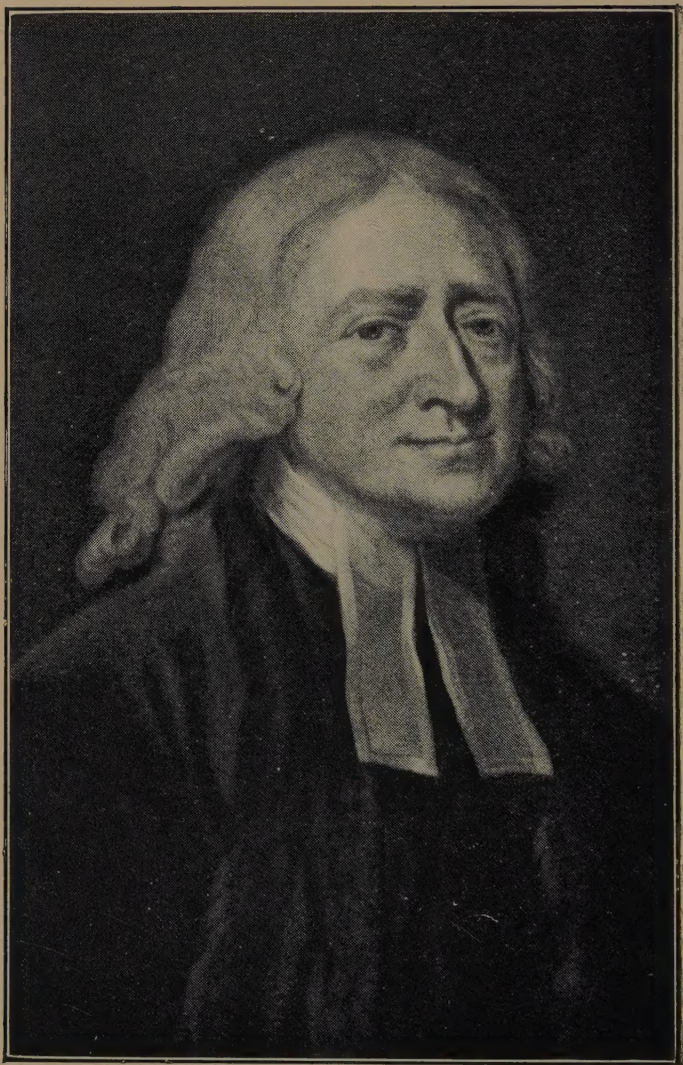




JOHN WESLEY







JOHN WESLEY.



# JOHN WESLEY

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BY

ARTHUR WALTERS

AUTHOR OF

"HUGH PRICE HUGHES; PIONEER AND REFORMER"

*WITH TWENTY ILLUSTRATIONS*

PUBLISHERS

S. W. PARTRIDGE & CO. LTD.

LONDON

TO  
MY FATHER

MADE IN GREAT BRITAIN

## PREFACE

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MY difficulty in writing this "Life" has been one of discrimination—what to include and what to omit. I am indebted to a number of writers who have been unwearied in collecting facts about the great evangelist. The volume is sent forth with the hope that some hitherto unacquainted with Wesley may be led to further study. There are few more inspiring pages in religious history than those which gather round his life.

A. W.





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# JOHN WESLEY

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY

"You cannot cut Wesley out of our national life. No single figure influenced so many minds, no single voice touched so many hearts. No other man did such a life's work for England."

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL.

A LITTLE less than six years ago witnessed the bi-centenary of John Wesley's birth. The occasion gave rise to a remarkable outburst of enthusiasm and appreciation for the man who did so much to make England what it is to-day. This enthusiasm and appreciation is now shared by all branches of the Christian Church; Christians everywhere recognise the magnitude and far-reaching results of Wesley's work. Some of the finest tributes paid to his memory come from those who do not belong to the Church which bears his name. This is as it should be, for there is a sense in which Wesley belongs to no Church or party, but to universal Christendom. He looked on the world as his parish, and the world to-day owes an immense debt of gratitude to his large-hearted sympathy and broad catholicity of spirit.

Wesley has suffered much at the hands of his friends

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as well as his enemies. During his lifetime he shared the lot of all great reformers—misunderstanding and misrepresentation. That misunderstanding and misrepresentation did not cease at death, nor has it entirely ceased to this day. This, perhaps, is not to be wondered at. There are some men whose whole character and conduct are transparent, needing little justification or explanation. Wesley's life and character are exceedingly complex, it must be admitted. He was a study in startling contrasts, and round such a life there is bound to range no little controversy. It is generally allowed that his early biographers failed to do him justice, and in many instances grossly misrepresented him, though, perhaps, unconsciously. Later writers have shown him in truer light, and the searchlight now thrown on every part of his life has not detracted, but added to his glory. The name of Wesley never shone with brighter lustre than it does to-day, and it may be that generations still to come will, if possible, hold his memory in greater reverence as the magnitude of his life's work becomes more apparent.

England was never in greater need of a religious reformer than when this "restless little man, with his great enthusiasms, his practical temper, his cool head, his wise and sane methods," appeared on the scene. He was a man truly sent from God, a messenger from heaven, a direct answer to the call of his time.

"Never an age, when God has need of him,  
Shall want its man, predestined by that need,  
To pour his life in fiery word or deed,—  
The strong Archangel of the Elohim!"

The condition of England as Wesley found it is now a familiar story, and want of space will prevent its repetition here. We are sometimes confronted with the pessimist who in despair speaks of the present

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moral and religious life of this country. True, it is very far from having reached perfection. There are many things bad and greatly to be deplored; there are still gigantic evils, dark blots on our boasted civilisation and progress. But compared with Wesley's England, the England of the twentieth century is a heaven.

Almost all historians agree in painting the picture very darkly—socially, morally, religiously. The literature of the time gives some insight into the moral and religious tone of the people. "It is an orgy of drunkenness, indecent levity and scepticism, a carnival of lasciviousness, profanity and godlessness, when religion was reduced to a jest." The remark of Montesquieu, the French philosopher who divided his time between his own country and ours, is significant of much. "If one speaks of religion in England everyone laughs." Wesley's own testimony is emphatic. "What," he asks, "is the present characteristic of the English nation? It is ungodliness. Ungodliness is our universal, our constant, our peculiar character."

Some indeed say there is a danger of exaggerating the picture. It is not denied that there were gleams of light. There was still the upraised Cross, and the gracious influence of the few who were living by faith in its redeeming and healing power. There was still a Church and the gates of hades had not prevailed against it. God is never left without witnesses, but, alas! they were few, and it would almost seem, viewing the century from afar, that religious life in England was dead, and faith in the Unseen unknown. The results of this were manifest on every side. Mr. Gladstone once described in the House of Commons the loss of religious faith as being "the most inexpressible calamity" that could fall either upon a nation or individual. That "inexpressible

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calamity" had fallen on England in the eighteenth century, with all its terrible consequences.

It has sometimes been a point of debate as to wherein lay Wesley's greatest service to humanity. That question can only be answered in general terms. There are some unacquainted with his life and work who think of him only as the founder, under God, of the great Methodist Churches. To them the statement of John Richard Green, the historian, that "the Methodists themselves were the least result of the Methodist Revival," might come as something of a surprise; and this is endorsed by a writer of our own day who says that "in a sense Wesley's least monument is the Church he built." This is saying a great deal when the magnitude of that Church as it exists to-day is remembered—a Church which, taking into account its various branches, numbers more adherents than any other Protestant Church in the world. Such is not said in slightest disparagement of Wesley's great work in founding the Methodist Societies, and their extensiveness and influence to-day, but rather in compliment of a larger work and influence that was his. Wesley's work was far greater than the mere founding of a religious Society, however great that Society may have since grown. It was something which affected the entire life and thought of the century in which he lived, and succeeding centuries; indeed, the far reaching influence of his work can never be wholly estimated. It made "a deep mark," says George W. E. Russell, "on the Established Church, gave new and permanent life to English Nonconformity, and sensibly affected the character and aspect of secular society." Dean Farrar once said that "from the impulse Wesley gave originates almost every special form of enthusiasm since his day." It



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was enthusiasm for the highest, for the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

In Handel's old church at Little Stanmore there is a marble tomb erected to the memory of an illustrious lady who, in a long list of elegant virtues, is described as having been "religious without enthusiasm." The date is the beginning of the eighteenth century's last quarter, and without doubt the additional merit implied in the qualification "without enthusiasm" was a hit at Wesley and his followers. It seemed quite natural then, when what little religion there was was cold and formal, and the showing of any enthusiasm for humanity ridiculous. But Wesley has made such a phrase an impossibility, a paradox. Not that there was in him the least touch of the fanatic; no saner man ever lived. It was because he made religion a passion and put first things first.

The testimony to far reaching effects of Wesley's work is endorsed on every side. John Richard Green, writing of the results of the Methodist Revival, says, "The action upon the Church broke the lethargy of the clergy. . . . In the nation at large appeared a new moral enthusiasm, whose power was seen in the disappearance of the profligacy of the upper classes, and the foulness which had infested literature ever since the Restoration. A new philanthropy reformed our prisons, infused clemency and wisdom into our penal laws, abolished the slave trade, and gave the first impulse to popular education. . . . A yet nobler result was the steady attempt which has never ceased from that day to this, to remedy the guilt, the ignorance, the physical suffering, the social degradation of the ignorant poor." But perhaps the highest tribute Green pays to Wesley is when he supports other historians in the opinion that the Methodists saved this country

# John Wesley

from the river of blood and ruin which devastated France during the French Revolution. This is great praise, but none too great. Lecky's statement is worthy of notice, that the little meeting in Aldersgate Street, where Wesley was converted, "forms an epoch in English history."

The story of the life of such a man cannot fail to enhearten and inspire. For all time it will stand as a call to service in the greatest of all causes—the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

"The task he left is ours to-day ; supreme  
And glad inheritance of us who bear  
The standard that he raised."

Its secret will be found to some extent in these pages. As we trace it from earliest beginnings, we shall see something of what enabled him to accomplish the mighty work he did. The man was great, but his greatness was not only of this world, it was a greatness made by the powers of heaven.

"The lesson of the Revival," says Dr. Dale, "is a lesson of faith in God. The men who began this work a century and a half ago did not know what was to come of it. They did the work which lay near to them, and within a few years they saw with wonder and with thankfulness the whole country agitated with religious excitement, and thousands and tens of thousands of men breaking with sin, turning to God, and doing works meet for repentance. They were true to God, and God blessed them and their work beyond the measure of their largest hopes."

Can we doubt that if men are true to God to-day, He will likewise bless them and their work beyond the measure of their largest hopes?

## CHAPTER II

### ANCESTRY AND CHILDHOOD

"I do intend to be more particularly careful of the soul of this child, that Thou hast so mercifully provided for, than ever I have been, that I may do my endeavour to instil into his mind the principles of Thy true religion and virtue."

WESLEY'S MOTHER.

ON the Isle of Axholme, Lincolnshire, is a small market town named Epworth, pleasantly situated on the brow of a hill, and numbering about two thousand souls. The world would have known little of it, save that in its old thatched Parsonage on the 17th of June, 1703, John Wesley was born, and four years later his brother Charles. John was the fifteenth of the rector of Epworth's nineteen children. Baptised a few hours after birth, he received the names of John and Benjamin, after two of his brothers who had died in infancy, but the second name he never used.

The briefest survey of John Wesley's ancestry shows that he not only came of a good clerical stock, well educated, gifted, and of some distinction, but that he was, as Southey says, "emphatically of a good family in the sense wherein Wesley himself would have used the term." His father, Samuel Wesley, was the son of a John Wesley or Westley, as the name originally was, and grandson of the Rev. Bartholomew Wesley, a son of Sir Herbert Wesley, of Westleigh, in Devonshire, and Elizabeth de Wellesley, of Dagan, County Meath, in

# John Wesley

Ireland. Bartholomew Wesley held the livings of Charmouth and Catheston, in Dorsetshire, until his ejection by the Act of Uniformity in 1662.

The first John Wesley, son of Bartholomew, deserves something more than a 'passing notice. A man of great zeal and ability, it is generally acknowledged that the founder of Methodism inherited from him many of his best traits. Born in 1636 the religious feeling early showed itself. The boy kept a diary in which he recorded his spiritual experiences ; unfortunately all traces of this are now lost. He became a student of New Inn Hall, Oxford, and lived a serious and diligent life. Especially well versed in Oriental languages he won the notice and esteem of some of the highest authorities at the University. He first began to preach at Radipole, a village near Weymouth, and later became vicar of Winterborn-Whitchurch, in Dorsetshire. After suffering imprisonment for refusing to read the Book of Common Prayer in his church, he was deprived of his living by the Act of Uniformity. From this time on he suffered many checks and reverses, but although harassed by oppression and poverty, and driven from town to town, he never lost an opportunity to preach and do good. He was a true itinerant evangelist, and worthy ancestor of his illustrious grandson. While at Winterborn-Whitchurch he married Miss White, a niece of Dr. Fuller, the Church historian. They had a numerous family, among them being Samuel, the father of the founder of Methodism.

Samuel Wesley's life had in it all the elements of romance and tragedy. He was destined and trained for the Nonconformist ministry, but owing to a change in views took orders in the Church of England. He was desperately poor at the time, with few friends, and a



## Ancestry and Childhood

widowed mother quite unable to help him. But his determination to get a University training recognised no obstacles, and one morning, with the sole possession of forty-five shillings, he set out on foot from London to Oxford, and entered himself as a "servitor" of Exeter College. Five years later he was admitted to Priest's Orders by the Bishop of London. For one year he held a curacy in London, and for another a chaplaincy on a man-of-war, afterwards returning to another curacy in London. Scholar, preacher, pastor, pamphleteer, and poet, his life was not uneventful. Whatever may have been his faults, his courage in adversity, fortitude in labour, and lofty conception of duty cannot but be admired.

It was while a curate in London, receiving the munificent sum of £30 a year, slightly increased by literary work, that Samuel Wesley married Susannah, a daughter of Dr. Annesley. "The mother of the Wesleys," as she is affectionately called, was in many ways a most remarkable woman. She was a pronounced beauty, to which was added rare accomplishments. Sir Peter Lely, a painter of the "beauties" of his age, executed a portrait of one of her sisters—"a woman of rare charms." One who well knew them both said, that beautiful as Miss Annesley appears, she was far from being as beautiful as Mrs. Wesley. Her accomplishments included a knowledge of Greek, Latin, and French, and a more than average acquaintance with literature. Above all, she was a woman of deep piety and inward devotion, caring as much, perhaps more, for her children's souls as their bodies. Like her husband, she had turned from Nonconformity to the Established Church, after careful examination of the points of controversy.

In 1690 Samuel Wesley received his first preferment, and was presented with the living of South Ormsby, in Lincolnshire. Here he stayed until 1697, when he

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removed to Epworth, remaining there until his death in 1735. The Parsonage at Epworth was an unpretentious, three-storeyed building, but a decided improvement on the home the young couple had had at South Ormsby, which the rector describes as "a mean cot, composed of reeds and clay."



THE PARSONAGE AT EPWORTH

What was the life of the household into which the founder of Methodism was born? At the time there were already a number of children at the Parsonage, though the existence of one would have been scarcely realised. The home life at Epworth reads somewhat strangely in modern ears, indeed everything does in connection with early Methodism. Mrs. Wesley has

## Ancestry and Childhood

left on record an account of the system of training which held at the Parsonage. It cannot be passed over lightly, for without doubt it had no little share in shaping Wesley's ideals for Methodism.

From earliest infancy strict discipline and rule were the order of the day. Sleep was regulated by the clock. During the first three months of life, three hours in the morning and three hours in the afternoon was the allotted time, and this was gradually shortened (by method) until the children required none at all during the day. Whether asleep or awake they were laid in the cradle, and taken out again at the appointed time. As the months went on they were taught to "cry softly," so that the sound of a child crying became a practically unknown thing in the Wesley family. Wesley said: "My mother had ten children, yet not one of them was ever heard to cry after it was a year old."

Like method and rule was adopted regarding food. Eating between meals was strictly forbidden. There were three meals a day, and only one dish was to be eaten of, and that sparingly. The children were never allowed to ask aloud for anything, but to whisper softly their wants to the servant attending them. They were to take whatever was set before them, and in addressing each other prefix brother and sister to the Christian name.

Mrs. Wesley laid great stress on conquering the will early in life. "In order to form the minds of children," she said, "the first thing to be done is to conquer their will, and bring them to an obedient temper. . . . I insist upon conquering the will of children betimes, because this is the only strong and rational foundation of a religious education." As soon as the children could talk they were taught the Lord's Prayer, and

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repeated it both morning and night. Even before that accomplishment they were taught to ask a blessing by signs, and to kneel quietly at family prayers.

Religious and moral instruction was given in a most systematic way. This was done by means of a manual of doctrine, which Mrs. Wesley herself prepared. There were periods of retirement for prayer and devotion, also times for private conversation on spiritual matters between the mother and each child. That these were not in vain is shown by the fact that years afterwards, when John Wesley was Fellow of Lincoln College, he wrote to his mother: "If you can spare me only that little part of Thursday evening which you formally bestowed upon me in another manner, I doubt not but that it would be as useful now for correcting my heart, as it was then in forming my judgment."

Mrs. Wesley was the schoolmistress at the Parsonage. Although the children's religious instruction began so early in life, they were not taught the letters of the alphabet until they had completed their fifth year. Six hours was the allotted time for mastering this, and in nearly every case it was done. Recreation was strictly limited, and on no account was talking or playing allowed in school hours. Altogether, the Parsonage at Epworth was a remarkable household, inhabited by remarkable people.

It is little wonder that we read that "from early childhood John was remarkable for his sober and studious disposition, and seemed to feel himself answerable to his reason and his conscience for everything he did." And with still less wonder, that when asked to have bread and fruit at other times than at meals, he would answer, "I thank you, I will think of it." "Child," said his father to him one day, "you think

## Ancestry and Childhood

to carry everything by dint of argument, but you will find how little is ever done in the world by close reasoning." "I profess, sweetheart," said the rector to Mrs. Wesley, "I think our Jack would not attend to the most pressing necessities of nature, unless he could give a reason for it."

The boy's seriousness of mind on religious matters can be gathered from the fact that at eight years of age his father admitted him to Holy Communion. "I believe till I was about ten years old," he afterwards wrote, "I had not sinned away that 'washing of the Holy Ghost' which was given me in baptism."

It was not an altogether peaceful life that this remarkable family lived at the Parsonage. Poverty often stared them in the face, while tyranny and oppression were not unknown. The rector was not over popular with his parishioners. It was not from any neglect of duty, but rather because of his political zeal and high church and state principles. Besides injuring his cattle, the mob in other ways made things very unpleasant. In 1702 two-thirds of the Parsonage was burnt down, and two years later the rector's flax shared the same fate. The most serious fire occurred on 9th February, 1709. There is little doubt that this was the act of some malicious parishioner. Some account of it must be given because of the very providential escape of little "Jacky."

It occurred at midnight when all the family were in bed. The first to raise alarm indoors was Hetty, who hastened to tell her father, who had already heard a cry of fire from the street, but had not realised that it was his own house that was ablaze. The family was roused with all possible speed. The fire had already made considerable progress, and every moment was precious, nearly all the means of exit rapidly becoming



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unavailable. All the household was safely brought to the ground, with the exception of "Jacky," then about five years old. He, with a nurse and four of the children, were sleeping in the nursery; when the alarm was given, the nurse snatched up the youngest, and bade the others follow. This they did, with the exception of "Jacky," who had not awaked. His father, thinking he heard crying, made several courageous attempts to get through the flames, but was driven back by their fierceness. Realising the hopelessness of the situation, as far as human effort was concerned, he gathered the family round him, and all kneeled down whilst Mr. Wesley commended his boy to God. A striking scene indeed. The rector, surrounded by his terrified wife and frightened children; the Parsonage fiercely burning, with all the attendant excitement a fire brings, and the fervent prayer going up to Heaven for the little one still in the burning house.

The rest of the narrative shall be told in John Wesley's own words:—"I believe it was just at that time I waked; for I did not cry, as they imagined, unless it was afterwards. I remember all the circumstances as distinctly as though it were but yesterday. Seeing the room was very light, I called to the maid to take me up. But none answering, I put my head out of the curtains, and saw streaks of fire on the top of the room. I got up and ran to the door, but could get no further, all the floor beyond it being in a blaze. I then climbed up on a chest which stood near the window. One in the yard saw me, and proposed running to fetch a ladder. Another answered, 'There will not be time; but I have thought of another expedient: here, I will fix myself against the wall; lift a light man, and set him on my shoulders.' They did so, and he took me out of the window. Just then the



JOHN WEELEY RESCUED FROM THE FIRE



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whole roof fell in; but it fell inward, or we had all been crushed at once. When they brought me into the house where my father was, he cried out, 'Come, neighbours, let us kneel down! Let us give thanks to God! He has given me all my eight children: let the house go; I am rich enough.'

A providential escape indeed. John Wesley ever remembered it with gratitude. Under one of his portraits, engraved during his lifetime, is a representation of a burning house, with the inscription, "Is not this a brand plucked from the burning?" From that night Mrs. Wesley seemed to regard little Jacky as a "chosen vessel." "I do intend," she wrote in her book of private meditations, "to be more particularly careful of the soul of this child that Thou hast so mercifully provided for than ever I have been, that I may do my endeavour to instil into his mind the principles of Thy true religion and virtue."

When nearly eleven years of age John left the Parsonage for Charterhouse. Of Charterhouse he always retained the happiest memories, though his life there was not without hardship. But he was not the boy to complain; the manliness and courage he had learned at the Parsonage stood him in good stead. It was a custom of the elder boys to take by force part of the food apportioned to the younger. This injustice little Wesley did not escape, and often bread was the only solid food he got. His comment on this is characteristic: "From ten to fourteen I had little but bread to eat, and not plenty of that. I believe this was so far from hurting me that it laid the foundation of lasting health." Strict injunctions had been given the schoolboy by his father to run round the Charterhouse gardens three times every morning, and this he conscientiously did.

## Ancestry and Childhood

Wesley was a diligent and successful student. We catch an interesting glimpse of him from a letter written by his brother Samuel, who was at Westminster school at the time, and who seems to have given direction and help to John in his studies. "My brother Jack, I can faithfully assure you, gives you no manner of discouragement from breeding your third son a scholar." And again, "Jack is with me, and a brave boy, learning Hebrew as fast as he can."

Some severe strictures have been passed on Wesley's manner of life at Charterhouse. These have chiefly been built upon his own judgment of himself:—"The next six or seven years were spent at school, where, outward restraints being removed, I was much more negligent than before, even of outward duties, and almost continually guilty of outward sins." What these words exactly mean we cannot say, but some light is thrown on them by what follows:—"However, I still read the Scriptures, and said my prayers morning and evening. And what I now hoped to be saved by was—(1) Not being so bad as other people. (2) Having still a kindness for religion. And (3) reading the Bible, going to church, and saying my prayers." With the remembrance of these latter words, it is manifestly unjust to say (as one of Wesley's biographers does) that he "entered Charterhouse a saint and left it a sinner." It is probable that the schoolboy did succumb to some of the temptations common to the public schools of those days, but he still had a "tender respect for religion, the fear of God, and the forms of Christian propriety."

While Wesley was at Charterhouse, there occurred the mysterious noises and disturbances at the Epworth Parsonage which have now become famous wherever his name is known. They began with strange sounds,

## John Wesley

dismal groans, and loud knockings, heard on every storey and in most of the rooms of the house. These soon became a source of consternation to the household, and wonder to the neighbouring villagers. Later, footsteps were heard during all hours of the day and night, and so familiar did the ghostly disturber become that one of Wesley's sisters nicknamed him "Old Jeffrey," after a former rector. As time went on the family grew quite accustomed to "Old Jeffrey's" antics, and at night time, when the tapping commenced, would say, "Jeffrey is coming, it is time to sleep." In the daytime, one of Wesley's little sisters, Kezzy, a girl six years old, would run upstairs and follow "Old Jeffrey" from room to room, thinking it great fun. The father was again and again advised to leave the Parsonage, but would reply, "No, let the devil flee from *me*, I will never flee from *him*."

John, away at Charterhouse, heard accounts of these strange proceedings, and was greatly impressed, nor was the impression a mere passing one. He afterwards made lengthy inquiries, and gathered all that was to be known of them, and wrote a detailed account for the *Arminian Magazine*. To the end of his days he does not seem to have had the least doubt that the disturbances were supernatural.

## CHAPTER III

### OXFORD AND OXFORD METHODISM

"Whatever I am, my Jack is a fellow of Lincoln."

WESLEY'S FATHER.

"Here is a new sect of Methodists sprung up."

COMMENT ON THE HOLY CLUB.

IN 1720 Wesley entered Oxford University, becoming a student at Christ Church. He was now seventeen years of age. He is described as being "a gay and sprightly youth, with a turn for wit and humour." To this was added a more than ordinary skill in logic, a gift which became of considerable value in after years. He was already something of a writer of verse; an imitation of the sixty-fifth Psalm which he composed was sent to his father, who expressed his pleasure with it, and advised him to cultivate the talent.

We have noted that his religion at Charterhouse was more of a form than a reality, and in this state it continued during his early years at Oxford. He still said his prayers and read the Bible with other devotional literature, especially comments on the New Testament. "Yet I had not all the while," he says, "so much as a notion of inward holiness; nay, went on habitually, and for the most part, very contentedly, on some or other known sin, though with some intermission and short struggles, especially before and after the Holy Communion, which I was obliged to receive three times a year."

# John Wesley

About this time he was much impressed by a conversation he had late one night with the porter of his College. The poor fellow had few clothes and little to eat, yet Wesley found him full of gratitude to God. "You thank God when you have nothing to wear, nothing to eat, and no bed to lie upon. What else do you thank Him for?" "I thank Him," replied the porter, "that He has given me life and being, and a heart to love Him, and a desire to serve Him." Wesley felt that this man had learned something of which he himself was ignorant.

Money was a constant source of trouble, and debt a frequent state. His allowance was small, and his father had no means whereby he could help him to any appreciable extent. More than once, when asking his sisters to write him, he playfully remarks that though he was so poor, he would be able "to spare the postage for a letter now and then."

We now reach a notable year in Wesley's life—1725 : a period which may fairly be described as an era in his history. It was the beginning of the great change that was to take place thirteen years later. His mind was turned towards taking orders in the Church of England, and lengthy correspondence passed between him and his parents on the subject. His father at first thought it too early; his mother, however, wrote: "I was much pleased with it, and liked the proposal well. . . . I approve the disposition of your mind, and think the sooner you are a deacon the better." A short time after, however, his father changed his mind, and wrote urging his son to prayer and study.

It was at this time that Wesley began to read carefully the "Imitation of Christ." The book opened up an entirely new view of religion. He began to see that true religion was seated in the heart, and that God's



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laws extended to all thoughts as well as words and actions. He was, however, angry with the author for being too strict, yet he says he "had frequently much sensible comfort in reading him." About the same time he met with a religious friend, which he had never done till now. "I began to alter the whole form of my conversation, and to set in earnest upon a new life. I set apart an hour or two a day for religious retirement; I communicated every week. I watched against all sin, whether in word or deed. I began to aim at, and to pray for, inward holiness. So that now, doing so much, and living so good a life, I doubted not that I was a good Christian."

He also read Jeremy Taylor's "Holy Living and Dying," and as a result determined to follow Taylor's advice, and to take a more exact account than he had done before of the manner in which he spent his time, writing down how he employed every hour. To this we owe the "Journals" which give such a remarkable account of his work and travels. But a still greater and more important effect of Wesley reading Taylor's book was the resolution to dedicate all his life to God—all his thoughts and words and actions—being thoroughly convinced that there was no medium, but that every part of his life (not some only) must either be a sacrifice to God, or himself. This is very rightly called a turning-point in Wesley's history. It was the first streak of the great light that was later to dawn on his soul.

In 1725 Wesley was ordained deacon by Bishop Potter, and preached his first sermon at South Leigh, a village near Witney. The year following, he was elected Fellow of Lincoln College. His father was greatly pleased at this honour, and playfully wrote him a letter beginning, "Dear Mr. Fellow-Elect of Lincoln."

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His purse had been much taxed by the expenses of the election, and he says that he had not much more than five pounds to keep his family from the end of March till after harvest. "What will be my own fate God only knows. *Sed passi graviora*. Whatever I am, my Jack is Fellow of Lincoln." This same year Charles Wesley removed from Westminster School to Christ Church. He came up to the University with the intention of having a good time, and when spoken to by John about religion, would warmly answer, "What! would you have me be a saint all at once?"

In a letter addressed to his brother Samuel we have an amusing instance of Wesley's economy at this time. He wore his hair remarkably long, and flowing loose upon his shoulders. His mother had urged him to have it cut, thinking it prejudicial to his health. He thought that to have it cut might add some colour to his complexion, and give him a more genteel appearance. But these, unless ill-health was added, did not seem sufficient reasons for spending two or three pounds a year. "I am ill able enough to spare them," he writes.

The summer of this year was spent with his parents at Epworth and Wroot. Shortly after his return to Lincoln College, he was chosen Greek lecturer, and Moderator of the Classes, though he had not yet taken a Master's Degree, and was only in his twenty-third year. He had now become conspicuous at the University as a scholar, and man of fine literary tastes.

A step further was made in his religious experience by reading Law's "Christian Perfection" and "Serious Call." At first, he tells us, he was "much offended at many parts of both," yet they convinced him more than ever of the exceeding height and breadth and depth of the law of God, and the impossibility of being half a

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Christian. He determined to be altogether devoted to God, to give Him his soul and body and substance.

In 1727 Wesley left Oxford, and became his father's curate at Wroot, a small living held in addition to Epworth. He had taken his Master's degree with distinction. The following year he was ordained priest by Bishop Potter. The period he spent at Wroot does not seem to have been eventful. "I preached much," he says, "but saw no fruit of my labour." In 1729 he returned to Oxford at the call of Dr. Morley, the rector of his College, and here remained until he sailed for Georgia in 1735.

Wesley tells us that before he returned to Oxford he travelled some miles to see "a serious man." "Sir," said this person, "you wish to serve God and go to heaven; remember you cannot serve Him alone; you must therefore find companions, or make them; the Bible knows nothing of solitary religion." These companions were already waiting him on his return to Oxford.

During his absence, his brother Charles, whom it will be remembered came up to Christ Church in 1726, had become of a more serious turn of mind, and was attending the weekly sacrament with two or three others he had induced to attend with him. Wesley immediately joined Charles and his companions, and became leader of the little band. They were known by many names—The Holy Club, the Godly Club, Sacramentarians, Bible-moths, and Bible-bigots; but the name that stuck was Methodists. This was given by a young student of Christ Church, who, noting their methodical manner of life, remarked, "Here is a new sect of Methodists sprung up." The name had previously been used to describe an old school of physicians, who taught that almost all diseases might be cured by a specific method of diet

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and exercise. It had also been used as a term of reproach to a religious party.

Let it be noted that the name was given to the little group before John Wesley returned to the University; thus there is a sense in which it can be said that the great Methodist movement was begun, not by John Wesley, but by his brother Charles. Beside the Wesleys, William Morgan, of Christ Church, and Robert Kirkham, of Merton, seem to have been the chief members. Here is Charles Wesley's account of the origin of the Club: "My first year at College I lost in diversions; the next I set myself to study. Diligence led me to serious thinking. I went to the weekly Sacrament, and persuaded two or three young students to accompany me, and to observe the method of study prescribed by the statutes of the University. This gained me the harmless name of Methodist." The little band increased as time went on; among their number being John Gambold, Benjamin Ingham, John Clayton, and George Whitefield, who joined in 1735.

John Wesley was now the Curator or Father of the Club. Mr. Samuel Wesley writes: "I hear my son John has the honour of being styled the Father of the Holy Club; if it be so, I am sure I must be the grandfather of it; and I need not say that I had rather any of my sons should be so dignified and distinguished than to have the title of 'His Holiness.'" The members of the Club were bound together not only by their religious sympathies, but in their studies. Several evenings a week were spent in reading together the Greek Testament, and the Classics, and Sunday evenings in studying divinity. They fasted twice in the week, took the Sacrament with regularity, and had a rigid system of self-examination. Later they began a systematic visitation of the prisoners in Oxford Gaol. William



WESLEY SPEAKING AT A MEETING OF THE HOLY CLUB



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Morgan, one of their number, had visited the prison, and had become convinced of the good that might be done. He spoke to the Wesleys about it, and they agreed to visit there once or twice a week. They also visited and relieved the poor and sick in parishes where the clergy offered no objection, denying themselves in order that they might have the means to give to those in want. When Wesley had an income of thirty pounds a year, he lived on twenty-eight and gave away two. The next year, receiving sixty pounds, he still lived on twenty-eight, and gave away thirty-two. When he received ninety pounds, he gave away sixty-two. The following year, receiving an income of one hundred and twenty pounds, he gave away ninety-two. One winter's night a girl called on him. "You seem half-starved," he said; "have you nothing to cover you but that thin linen gown?" "Sir," she answered, "this is all I have." The reflection immediately flashed across his mind: "Will thy Master say, 'Well done, good and faithful steward'? Thou hast adorned thy walls with the money which might have screened this poor creature from the cold! Oh, justice! Oh mercy! Are not these pictures the blood of this poor maid?"

John Gambold, a member of the Holy Club, who afterwards became a Moravian bishop, gives us an interesting picture of Wesley at this time: "Mr. John Wesley was always the chief manager, for which he was very fit. For he had not only more learning and experience than the rest, but he was blessed with such activity as to be always gaining ground, and such steadiness that he lost none; what proposals he made to any were sure to alarm them, because he was so much in earnest; nor could they always slight them, because they saw him always the same. What supported this uniform vigour was the care he took to consider well of



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every affair before he engaged in it, making all his decisions in the fear of God, without passion, humour, or self-confidence. . . . To this I may add that he had, I think, something of authority in his countenance. Yet he never assumed any to himself above his companions." Describing the work of the members of the Club, he says: "They took great pains with the younger members of the University, to rescue them from bad company, and to encourage them in a sober, studious life. When they had some interest with any such, they would get them to breakfast, and over a dish of tea endeavour to fasten some good hint upon them."

Such was the life of the first Oxford Methodists. It was not lived without opposition and ridicule. They practically stood alone in their good intentions, were blamed by the professors for their enthusiasms and extravagances, and laughed at by the bystanders as they passed to St. Mary's to take the Sacrament. A weekly journal of the day wrote of them as a number of persons who had doomed themselves to "absurd and perpetual melancholy"; and again, as "sons of sorrow, designed to make the whole place a monastery." Gambold says: "They seldom took any notice of the accusations brought against them; but if they made any reply, it was commonly such a plain and simple one, as if there was nothing more in the case but that they had just heard some doctrines of their Saviour, and had believed and done accordingly."

It is very evident that Wesley was now seeking justification before God by "aiming at a perfect obedience to His Law." He was holy, humble, and sincere, but his strivings after good did not meet with the satisfaction to himself he both wished and thought they would. There were frequent seasons of spiritual

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distress and perplexity. The full light that was soon to flood his soul had not yet dawned. "In this refined way," he writes of himself, "of trusting to my own works and my own righteousness, I dragged on heavily, finding no comfort or help therein till the time of my leaving England."

In 1730 he held a curacy for a brief while near Oxford, and the small stipend received enabled him to keep his horse, which he began to fear he would have to sell. Two years later he was in London, and visited William Law, who advised him concerning his reading. Law's writings, it will be remembered, produced a profound impression on his mind.

The following year he visited Epworth. His father's health was failing, and he urged his son to try to secure the Epworth living, but God had other plans than this. A year later the rector passed away at the age of seventy-two. "The weaker I am in the body," he said, "the stronger and more sensible support I feel from God." To one of his children he remarked: "Do not be concerned at my death, God will then begin to manifest Himself to my family." Putting his hands upon the head of his son Charles, he uttered strangely prophetic words: "Be steady. The Christian faith will surely revive in this kingdom. You shall see it, though I shall not."

Samuel Wesley's work had not been in vain. Seven years passed by, and his son John, excluded from the parish Church, stood upon his father's tombstone in Epworth Churchyard and preached to large crowds the Gospel of God. A great revival followed. "Oh, let none think his labour of love is lost," exclaimed Wesley in reviewing the work, "because the fruit does not immediately appear. Near forty years did my father labour here, but he saw little fruit of his labours. I took some pains among this people too, and my

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strength also seemed spent in vain; but now the fruit appeared."

This same year Wesley made the acquaintance of George Whitefield, who afterwards became so closely connected with the rise and progress of Methodism. Whitefield was desirous to know the Methodists, but had no means of introduction. At last opportunity occurred by hearing of a poor woman who had attempted to cut her throat in one of the workhouses. Whitefield sent to Charles Wesley and received an invitation to breakfast with him next morning. In this strange way did he become acquainted with the Wesleys and Oxford Methodism, and immediately adopted their rules. He was threatened expulsion by the master of his College, and endured much persecution. At first he suffered great distress of soul; he practised the most rigid self-denial, injuring his health by the severity of his self-inflicted rules. At length, through much agony and travail, he laid hold on Christ by a living faith, and found the inward peace and joy after which he craved.

Wesley was now on the eve of departure for his mission in Georgia, the story of which will be told in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER IV

### WESLEY IN GEORGIA

"I went to America to convert the Indians, but oh! who shall convert me?"—WESLEY.

"HAD I twenty sons I should rejoice if they were all so engaged, though I should never see them more." Thus replied Mrs. Wesley, on John consulting her about the proposed mission to Georgia. It was characteristic of her fine spirit and unworldly point of view. Wesley was in doubt whether he ought to leave her, for she was now dependent on her children for support. "I can be," he said in answer to the invitation to go, "the staff of her age, her chief support and comfort;" but his mother's unselfish answer set his mind at rest.

The brothers, accompanied by their two friends, Charles Delamotte and Benjamin Ingham, sailed in October, 1735. The colony for which they were bound was one that had been recently established between South Carolina and Florida, on the borders of the Savannah river, composed chiefly of persecuted Protestants from Germany, Scotch Highlanders, and some Moravians. The Governor was General Oglethorpe, a friend and correspondent of Wesley's father. Wesley was introduced to Oglethorpe, who was visiting England, by his friend Dr. Burton, of Corpus Christi College, one of the trustees for the colony. Both strongly urged him

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to undertake the mission. The men they wanted, Dr. Burton afterwards wrote, were men "inured to contempt of the ornaments and conveniences of life, to bodily austerities, and to serious thoughts." What men better fitted this description than the Oxford Methodists? In a communication of a later date, Dr. Burton wrote of the possibility of work among the negro slaves. As yet nothing had been done for them, but a door was now opened. "You see," he said, "the harvest is truly great." To this was added the further inducement of preaching the Gospel to the Indians.

Such a prospect could not fail to have some attraction for Wesley. He was thoroughly dissatisfied with himself; here perhaps would be found that after which he was so earnestly seeking. He says that the chief motive of his going was the hope of saving his own soul. He hoped to learn the true sense of the Gospel of Christ by preaching it to the heathen. They had no comments to construe away the text, no vain philosophy to corrupt it; no luxurious, sensual, covetous, ambitious expounders to soften its unpleasing truths. He was to meet with bitter disappointment and disillusionment in Georgia, but to learn invaluable lessons for after life.

Among those on board were a number of Germans, members of the Moravian Church, accompanied by their bishop, David Nitschman. Wesley lost no time in setting himself to learn German in order that he might more readily talk with them. A great debt is due to the Moravians for the influence their example and teaching exerted on Wesley. "They are a good, devout, peaceable, and heavenly-minded people," wrote Ingham in a letter to his mother, "and almost the only time you know they are on the ship is when they are harmoniously singing the praises of the great Creator, which they do twice a day. They live together

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in perfect love and peace, having for the present all things in common."

Wesley and his companions now began a rigid system of self-denial, more severe than any practised at Oxford. They wholly left off the use of flesh and wine, and confined themselves to vegetable food—chiefly rice and biscuits; later, they agreed to leave off taking any supper. Every moment of their time was sacredly used. They rose at four and spent an hour in private prayer; they then read the Bible together, carefully comparing it with the writings of the earliest ages. They breakfasted at seven, and at eight held public prayers. From nine to twelve Wesley spent in learning German, while his brother wrote sermons, and Delamotte studied Greek. At twelve they met for prayer and helpful conversation. Dinner was served at one. From dinner-time until four was spent in conversation about religion with the passengers; then followed public prayers, and afterward, retirement for private prayer. Supper was at six, after which Wesley read in his cabin to a few of the passengers, and his companions to a few more in theirs. At seven Wesley joined with the Moravians in their public service, while Ingham read to as many as desired to hear. At eight they met once again for mutual exhortation and instruction, retiring to rest between nine and ten; "where," says Wesley, "neither the roaring of the sea, nor the motion of the ship could take away the refreshing sleep which God gave us." All this illustrates Wesley's sincerity and earnestness and great desire to do good at this time. Stevens writes of it as "practical 'methodism' still struggling in its forming process; it was Epworth Rectory and Susannah Wesley's discipline afloat on the Atlantic."

A voyage to America in 1735 was very different



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from what it is to-day. It occupied many months, and was altogether a long and painful business, and not without danger. The voyage of the *Simmonds* was no exception. The vessel encountered frequent storms, which occasioned not a little panic among the passengers. Wesley himself was not free from fear, "being," as he says, "still unwilling to die."

During one violent storm he was amazed at the fearlessness shown by the Moravians. They had just commenced their evening service, when the angry sea broke over the vessel, splitting the mainsail in pieces and pouring in between the decks as if the great deep had already swallowed them up. A terrible screaming began among the English, but the Germans calmly sang on, heedless of any possible danger. This deliverance from the spirit of fear in the presence of death deepened the impression already made by the Moravians on Wesley. He afterwards asked one of them if he was not afraid to die. "I thank God, no," was the answer. "But were not your women and children afraid?" inquired Wesley. "No, our women and children are not afraid to die." From the Moravians, Wesley went to their "crying, trembling neighbours"—the English—and pointed out to them the difference in the hour of trial between him that feareth God and him that feareth Him not. "This," says he, "was the most glorious day which I have hitherto seen."

On 5th February, 1736, the *Simmonds* sailed into the Savannah river, casting its anchor near Tybee Island. Next morning the passengers set foot on American soil, and all kneeled down to give God thanks. Soon after arrival Wesley met August Gottlieb Spangenberg, a well-known minister of the Moravian Church, and sought from him advice about his future work and conduct. "My brother," said Spangenberg,

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"I must first ask you one or two questions. Have you the witness within yourself? Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God?" This simple question greatly surprised Wesley, and at first he was at a loss for an answer. Spangenberg observing this, put a still simpler question: "Do you know Jesus Christ?" Wesley paused, and then said: "I know He is the Saviour of the world." "True, but do you know He has saved you?" questioned the German. Wesley answered, "I hope He has died to save me." "Do you know yourself?" said Spangenberg. Wesley replied, "I do." "But," he adds, in recording the meeting, "I fear they were vain words." It was a strange conversation for one who had lived and worked as Wesley had, and throws much light on the uncertainty of his faith at this time.

Wesley was now at Savannah, his brother Charles and Ingham having gone to Frederica, about one hundred miles south. For a time John and Delamotte lodged with the Germans, and had further opportunity of watching their behaviour; "for we were," he says, "in one room with them from morning till night. They were always employed, always cheerful, and in good-humour with one another. They had put away all anger and strife, and wrath, and bitterness, and clamour, and evil-speaking. They walked worthy of the vocation wherewith they were called, and adorned the Gospel of our Lord in all things."

Wesley soon became busily employed, but not among the class of people to whom he had hoped to minister. He found himself preaching to as well dressed a congregation as any he had seen in London, and not without some success. The people crowded into the church; a ball that had been arranged by a gentleman had to be given up, for the ballroom was

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empty and the church full. He had hoped that his ministry would be among the Indians, but difficulties with which he had never reckoned presented themselves; indeed, the trustees of the Colony had appointed him minister of Savannah without his knowledge, and he saw there was no other course than for the present to remain there. At first the prospect appeared pleasing, though Wesley did not regard the future without some apprehension. Shortly after preaching his first sermon he wrote to his brother Charles: "I have hitherto had no opposition at all; all is smooth, and fair, and promising. Many seem to be awakened; all are full of respect and commendation. We cannot see any cloud gathering. But this calm cannot last; storms must come hither too; and let them come, when we are ready to meet them." The storms did come, earlier perhaps than Wesley anticipated.

The journal gives us some idea of the energy with which the Savannah minister threw himself into his work. He very soon established three services on the Sunday, conducting them according to High Church principles, Communion weekly, daily prayers morning and evening. A religious society was formed, and meetings for praise and prayer held three days in the week. The parishioners were visited from house to house. Special work was done among the French settlers, the Vaudois, and the Jews, and the needs of the children were not forgotten. Tyerman gives us a table of Wesley's Sunday work during the latter part of his Savannah ministry:—(1) English prayers from five to half-past six; (2) Italian prayers at nine; (3) Sermon, and Holy Communion for the English, from half-past ten to half-past twelve; (4) Service for the French at one; (5) Catechising the children at two; (6) Third English service at three; (7) After this

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a meeting in his own house for reading, prayer, and praise; (8) At six, the Moravian service began, which he was glad to attend, not to teach, but to learn." Whatever Wesley was lacking in at this time, it cannot be said he was lacking in energy, and a genuine desire to render God service. He still continued his ascetic practices, and was now taking only one kind of food, and that, bread.

What effect did Wesley's uncompromising High Churchism and asceticism have upon the colonists at Savannah? Had he gone no further than we have described, the story might perhaps have been different, but he was not content to remain there. Following the rubric he insisted on all children being baptised by immersion; and rejected as sponsors those who were not communicants. He refused to recognise any baptism which had not been performed by an episcopally ordained clergyman, and demanded re-baptism of all such. His "zeal" even led him to refuse the Communion to some of the most godly persons in the colony, because "their baptism was invalid." The burial service was also denied for the same reason. Southey rightly calls this "intolerant discipline," and it is not surprising that it roused bitter animosity; it was soon to lead Wesley into serious trouble.

Charles, it will be remembered, had gone to Frederica, but only to remain a few months. Difficulties had arisen with the governor of the colony, and a most painful situation created. The Frederica minister was slandered by the people, and his life endangered by their bitter hostility. He returned to England on the 26th of July, after a little more than five months' absence. John paid several visits to Frederica, but with small success. He paid his final visit in January, 1737, and was glad to see the last of the place. "It

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was not any apprehension of my own danger," he says, "though my life had been threatened many times, but an utter despair of doing good here, which made me content with the thought of seeing it no more."

On Sunday, 7th August, Wesley made the following brief, but significant entry in his journal:—"I repelled Mrs. Williamson from the Holy Communion." The real trouble had now begun in dead earnest. On the following Monday, "Mr. Recorder of Savannah" issued the following warrant:—

*"Georgia, Savannah, S.S.*

"TO ALL CONSTABLES, TITHINGMEN, and Others,  
whom these may concern.

"YOU, and each of you, are hereby required to take the body of John Wesley, Clerk :

"And bring him before one of the bailiffs of the said town to answer the complaint of William Williamson and Sophia, his wife, for defaming the said Sophia, and refusing to administer to her the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in a public congregation without cause; by which the said William Williamson is damaged one thousand pounds sterling; and for so doing, this is your warrant, certifying what you are to do in the premises. Given under my hand and seal the 8th day of August, Anno. Dom. 1737. THO. CHRISTIE."

Sophia Williamson was the niece of the storekeeper and chief magistrate of Savannah. She was not without attractions—"beautiful, elegant in her manners, and intelligent." She had been introduced to Wesley, before her marriage, shortly after his arrival in Georgia, as an earnest inquirer after salvation. Their relationship had gradually become intimate to a more than ordinary degree, evidently pointing to a still closer relationship in the future. That this was the lady's wish, and indeed



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her set design, there can be little doubt. She lost no opportunity of being in Wesley's company, sought his help in studying French, asked his advice about many things and took it, dressed according to his wishes in simple white, and nursed him for a week during an illness. Wesley—who all his life was susceptible to feminine charms, and unsuspecting of feminine design—fell deeply in love. One day Delamotte asked him if he intended to marry Miss Sophy ; it was very evident Delamotte did not favour the marriage, and Wesley began to consider. He determined to consult the Elders of the Moravian Church, and said he would abide by their decision. "We advise you to proceed no further in this business," said Bishop Nitschman, and Wesley replied: "The will of the Lord be done." Shortly afterwards Miss Hopkey married one of the settlers—a young man of the name of Williamson. On Saturday, 12th March, Wesley wrote in his journal: "God being very merciful to me, my friend performed what I could not."

We now return to the warrant issued for Wesley's arrest. He had repelled Mrs. Williamson from the sacrament because her conduct had not been becoming to a communicant. Her uncle, Mr. Causton, was angry at what he considered an unwarranted insult, and determined to have his revenge. A number of other charges, relative to ecclesiastical matters, were brought against Wesley. He was tried by a Grand Jury, many of whom were hostile, indeed openly avowed enemies, and ten bills were found against him. The only charge of a civil nature was the one affecting the character of Mrs. Williamson. He attended the court no fewer than seven times to answer this, but no justice was obtainable.

It now became clear that his best course was to embark for England. His enemies continued their



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persecution, there seemed little prospect of obtaining justice, and fresh evidence of an entirely false nature might any day be brought against him. "I saw clearly," he says, "the hour was come for leaving this place; and as soon as evening prayers were over, about eight o'clock, the tide then serving, I shook off the dust of my feet and left Georgia, after having preached the Gospel there (not as I ought, but as I was able) one year and nearly nine months." This was on 2nd December, 1737.

Setting aside Wesley's extreme High Churchism and intolerant discipline, no moral impropriety can be attached to his conduct in Georgia. That he was lacking in prudence and tact—all-important qualities for the work in which he was engaged—is very evident, but nothing more. We cannot but admire his high conception of duty, fearlessness in denouncing wrong and his courage in reproving evil-doers.

Was the Georgian mission altogether a failure? It is generally supposed to have been so, but who can tell? Goethe says, "Our defeats are not far removed from our victories." If Wesley met with defeat in Georgia, he was soon to meet with mighty triumph in England. But his mission had not been all failure; indeed, up to the unhappy affair with Mrs. Williamson, he had met with much success of a kind. Says Whitefield: "The good Mr. Wesley has done in America is inexpressible. His name is very precious among the people, and he has laid a foundation that I hope neither men nor devils will ever be able to shake."

Wesley's judgments on himself at this time are characteristically severe. "I went to America to convert the Indians," he writes, "but oh! who shall convert me? . . . I have a fair summer religion. I can talk well; nay, and believe myself while no danger is near; but let death look me in the face, and

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my spirit is troubled." Again, after arrival in England: "It is now two years and almost four months since I left my native country, in order to teach the Georgian Indians the nature of Christianity. But what have I learned myself in the meantime? Why (what I least of all expected), that I, who went to America to convert others, was never myself converted to God." In an appended note he adds: "I am not sure of this."

Wesley's judgments on himself must not be taken too literally. He had learned much. God had humbled him, and proved him, and shown him what was in his heart. He was not far from the kingdom of God. Soon the light was to dawn in full splendour, and he was to know the entire joy of the forgiven soul.

## CHAPTER V

### WESLEY RETURNS TO ENGLAND

"I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death."—WESLEY.

WESLEY was now in England, having landed at Deal at 4.30 on the morning of 1st February, 1738. His unhappy experiences in Georgia had not in any way damped his ardour. At Deal we find him reading prayers, and expounding Scripture in the inn. Later in the day he moved on to Faversham, and made an entry in his journal which shows the urgency of the need of a revival of religion in England at this time: "I here read prayers, and explained the Second Lesson to a few of those who were called Christians, but were indeed more savage in their behaviour than the wildest Indians I have yet met with." Two days later he came to London.

We now reach another important era in Wesley's history. During the week following his return to England, he notes in his journal the happenings of "a day much to be remembered"—7th February. It was the day on which he made the acquaintance of Peter Böhler. Böhler, who had recently been ordained for the Moravian ministry, had just landed in England from Germany, and was on his way to mission work in

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Carolina. We have already had occasion to observe the influence of the Moravians on Wesley; it was to be a Moravian who was ultimately to be the means used by God for leading him into the full light and conscious



PETER BÖHLER

knowledge of sin forgiven. The time was not yet, but Böhler's conversations were to bring it very near at hand. From the first meeting Wesley never lost an opportunity of conversing with him, and every conversation proved fruitful of good. Later, the two friends journeyed together to Oxford. The Moravian

## Wesley returns to England

minister's views puzzled Wesley not a little. "My brother, my brother," said he to him, "this philosophy of yours must be purged away."

An interesting account of Böhler's impression of Wesley at this time is given in a letter to Count Zinzendorf. "I travelled with the two brothers, John and Charles Wesley, from London to Oxford. The elder, John, is a good-natured man; he knew he did not properly believe on the Saviour, and was willing to be taught. . . . Our mode of believing in the Saviour is so easy to Englishmen, that they cannot reconcile themselves to it; if it were a little more artful they would much sooner find their way into it."

Returning to London, Wesley preached at St. Lawrence's. He says he believed God blessed this sermon most of the three he had preached during the day, "because it gave most offence"—an unconventional view of helpful preaching. He still continued to seize every opportunity to do good. We find him talking of the deepest things to his fellow travellers on the coaches, calling at odd houses and speaking plainly about religion; conversing with strangers and servants for their good in the various inns at which he lodged.

He again visited Oxford early in March. This time to see his brother Charles, who was recovering from a serious illness. Peter Böhler was there, and the two had further conversation. This interview was a memorable one, for Wesley tells us that he now became clearly convinced of unbelief, of that want of faith which alone can save men. He at once thought he ought to leave off preaching. How could he preach to others if he had no faith himself? But Böhler thought differently. "Preach faith till you have it," he said, "and then because you have it you will preach faith." Wesley took Böhler's advice, and began preaching this "new

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doctrine." The first person to whom he spoke of this salvation by faith was a prisoner under sentence of death. Böhler had many times asked him to speak to this man, but he had not done so, being, as he says, "a zealous asserter of the impossibility of death-bed repentance."

Wesley had now advanced another step. About three weeks later he again met Böhler, and was more than ever amazed at his strange talk, especially the accounts he gave of the fruits of living faith. An entry in his journal a few days later shows something of the progress he was now making, and the way in which he was gradually breaking away from his High Church practices. At a meeting of Mr. Fox's society, his heart was so full that he was unable to confine himself to the forms of prayer he was accustomed to use, and he made up his mind that he would not do so any more, but pray as the particular occasion demanded.

But he was still in difficulty. He had no objection to what his teacher had said of the nature of faith—"a sure trust and confidence which a man hath in God, that through the merits of Christ his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favour of God,"—but he could not understand how such could be an *instantaneous* work; how faith could be given in a moment; how a man could *at once* be turned from sin and misery to righteousness and joy in the Holy Ghost. He again diligently searched the Scriptures, in particular the Acts of the Apostles, and was astonished to find scarce any instances there of other than instantaneous conversions. But he argued to himself this might be in the first ages of Christianity—but the times are changed. The testimony of several living witnesses however settled this, and all he could now cry was, "Lord, help Thou my unbelief." He again asked Böhler whether he ought



## Wesley returns to England

not to refrain from teaching others. "No," answered the Moravian, "do not hide in the earth the talent God hath given you."

On Monday, 1st May, Wesley was again in London. A little Society had been formed by the Moravians, and on this evening they met for the first time. Two days later, Charles, through earnest conversation with Böhler, was convinced of the true nature of saving faith. The day following, Böhler left London in order to embark for Carolina. His stay in England had indeed been fruitful. "Oh, what a work hath God begun since his coming into England!" says Wesley, "such an one as shall never come to an end, till heaven and earth pass away."

Both brothers had now become convinced of the true nature of saving faith. Charles was to first experience it; this he did on Whit-Sunday, 21st May. On the following Wednesday morning, about five o'clock, Wesley tells us that he opened his New Testament on these words: "There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises;" and again, just before going out: "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." Words strangely prophetic of what was to transpire before the day's close. That evening he went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where someone was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter to nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, Wesley felt his heart "strangely warmed." He says: "I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation, and an assurance was given me that He had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved me from the law of sin and death." He immediately began to pray for his enemies, and testify to all present what he felt.

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This was a memorable night in the history of Methodism. "From this hour," says Dr. Rigg, in his study on the "Living Wesley," "this ritualistic priest and ecclesiastical martinet was to be transformed into a flaming preacher of the great Evangelical salvation and life, in all its branches and its rich and varied experiences. Hence arose Wesleyan Methodism, and all the Methodist Churches."

Dr. Dale, in his "Fellowship with Christ," says: "That wonderful experience, that revelation of Christ, had a direct and vital relation to all that has given the name of John Wesley an enduring place in the history of Christendom. But for that, there would have been no Methodist Revival; but for that, the great sisterhood of Methodist societies . . . belonging to many races speaking many tongues, and which might be described with pardonable rhetorical exaggeration as gathered out of every country under heaven—but for that great experience, that revelation of Christ in John Wesley, these societies would have had no existence."

Wesley had now entered upon a new experience. His conversion he called it; and conversion it was, in the sense that it meant for him an entirely new view of the essential truths of the Christian religion. It had come through much travail; for ten long years he had been seeking it in various ways, and the conflict had not been unreal. He had thought that salvation could be secured by his own righteousness, and by strict adherence to the law. Had it been so, he would have attained it long since—for all had thought him a saint. He had now come to see that salvation was the gift of God, and obtainable only by faith in Jesus Christ. He had passed from the works of the law to faith, and was henceforth to teach that men are saved by faith and faith alone. He was much buffeted with temptations,

## Wesley returns to England

but he cried out, and they fled away. They returned again and again; but as oft as he lifted up his eyes to heaven help was given. "And herein," says he, "I found the difference between this and my former state chiefly consisted. I was striving, yea, fighting with all my might under the law, as well as under grace. But then I was sometimes, if not often, conquered; now, I was always conqueror."

This change in Wesley created not a little surprise among some of his friends. At the house of Mr. Hutton, where a religious service was being held, he especially startled some by getting up and boldly declaring that until within the last five days he had never been a Christian. "Have a care, Mr. Wesley," cried Hutton in amazement, "how you despise the benefits received by the two sacraments." The assertion was repeated later at supper in the presence of Mrs. Hutton, who indignantly replied: "If you have not been a Christian ever since I knew you, you have been a great hypocrite, for you made us all believe that you were one." Wesley explained, "When we renounce everything but faith and get into Christ, then, and not till then, have we any reason to believe we are Christians." Mrs. Hutton thought these to be "wild notions," and greatly feared their effect on her children, who held the highest opinion of Wesley's sanctity and judgment.

Shortly after his conversion, Wesley made up his mind to retire for a short time to Germany, and visit the Moravian settlement of Herrnhut, on the borders of Bohemia. The conflict was not fully passed, and the strain of recent events had told on him. "My weak mind could not bear to be thus sawn asunder," he says; "and I hoped the conversing with those holy men who were themselves living witnesses of the full power of faith, and yet able to bear with those that are

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weak, would be a means, under God, of so establishing my soul, that I might go on from faith to faith, and 'from strength to strength.'"

Accordingly he sailed from Gravesend on 13th June, arriving at Rotterdam two days later. The party met with some strange experiences. At Goudart several inns refused to take them in; at last, after much difficulty, one was found, "where," says Wesley, "they did us the favour to take our money for some meat and drink, and the use of two or three bad beds." At Isselstein Wesley visited a small colony of Moravians; at Frankfort he had an interview with Peter Böhler's father; near by, at Marienborn, he found Count Zinzendorf. The Count had hired a large house where some ninety people of different nationalities lived together. Wesley stayed for a while in the neighbourhood, and not without good. "Here," says he, "I continually met with what I sought for—viz., living proofs of the power of faith."

Quitting Marienborn, he set out for the Moravian settlement at Herrnhut, arriving there early in August. A convenient lodging was assigned him in the house provided for strangers, and he had every opportunity of observing whether the accounts he had heard of the settlement had been exaggerated or not. He was greatly impressed with everything he saw and heard. In a letter to his brother Samuel he says, "God has given me at length the desire of my heart. I am with a Church whose conversation is in heaven, in whom is the mind of Christ, and who walk as He walked." In his journal he writes: "I would gladly have spent my life here, but my Master calling me to labour in another part of His vineyard, on 14th August, I was constrained to take my leave of this happy place. . . . Oh, when shall this Christianity cover the earth, as the

## Wesley returns to England

‘waters cover the sea’?” Wesley returned to England in September. His visit to Germany had been a fitting preparation for the great work that lay before him.

Before passing on to this work, some attention must be given to a name inseparably bound up with it. We have already had occasion to refer to George Whitefield in these pages. Southey says: “It is apparent that though the Wesleys should never have existed, Whitefield would have given birth to Methodism.” We cannot tell; there can be little doubt, however, that by Whitefield’s powerful preaching, Wesley’s work received a mighty impetus. One writer describes him as the “Baptist of Methodism.” He was in every way a most remarkable man. Born at an inn in the city of Gloucester in 1714, he left school before he was fifteen years of age, and began occasionally to assist his mother in the work of the public-house. Later, he entered Pembroke College as a servitor, and there, as we have seen, became acquainted with the Wesleys, and joined the Holy Club. During John Wesley’s absence in America, he took his place as president of the Club, and was zealous in every good work. Being on a visit to Bristol, he met the Bishop of Gloucester, who ultimately ordained him. His first sermon created no little sensation. He possessed to a remarkable degree the gift of eloquence, and all who heard him came under its spell. Those who came to scoff grew serious as the words proceeded from the preacher’s mouth. But his power did not lie in mere eloquence. “It was the utterance of the whole man—heart, head, and person.” His soul was on fire with the message that possessed him. “He preached like a lion,” said one of his hearers.

After ordination he returned to Oxford and continued



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THE STATUE ERECTED TO WHITEFIELD  
IN MANSFIELD COLLEGE, OXFORD

his work in connection with the Holy Club. Returning to London, he preached for a time at the Tower with remarkable effect. The building was crowded, people being present from all parts. Later he went to Dummer, in Hampshire. While in London he had received several letters from the Wesleys in Georgia, and these seemed to make him desirous to join them. "Only Mr. Delamotte is with me," wrote John, "till God shall stir up the hearts of some of His servants who, putting their lives in His hands, shall come over and help us. What if thou art the man, Mr. Whitefield?" In another letter he wrote: "Do you ask what you shall have? Food to eat, and raiment to put on; a house to lay your head in, such as your Lord had not; and a crown of glory that fadeth not away." Whitefield



## Wesley returns to England

says that on reading this his heart leaped within him and, as it were, echoed to the call.

He first went to Bristol to say farewell to some of his friends. Here he preached with even greater effect than elsewhere. "The whole city," he said, "seemed to be alarmed." The churches were as crowded on week-days as they used to be on Sundays. Returning after a short absence, the excitement was even more intense. The crowd came a mile out of the city to welcome him, blessing him as he passed along the streets. Wherever he preached there were dense throngs of people. "Some hung upon the rails of the organ-loft, others climbed upon the leads of the church, and altogether made the church so hot with their breath, that the steam would fall from the pillars like drops of rain." After his farewell sermon the crowd followed him, weeping, into the streets, and only by leaving secretly in the middle of the night could he escape them. Before embarking he preached in London, where it was necessary to place constables at the door of the churches to regulate the crowds of anxious hearers. He left England a few hours before Wesley arrived from Georgia. The vessels passed in sight of each other. Whitefield remained in the colony about four months; of his work on his return we shall have something to say in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE REVIVAL BEGINS

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
Because He anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor :  
He hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives,  
And recovering of sight to the blind,  
To set at liberty them that are bruised,  
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

ST. LUKE'S GOSPEL, iv. 18.

SOME account has already been given of the dire need of a revival of religion in England during the eighteenth century. The man who, under God, was to be its inspirer was now ready. Great had been his preparation—through long years of trial and hardship, darkness and doubt, Wesley had at length reached an earthly goal. A simple act of faith in Christ had brought about the desired consummation—a realisation of sin forgiven. There were still occasional periods of perplexity, as there are for all great souls, but with an intense belief in this experience being possible for every man he was to face the world, and before long the country was to ring with the glad news of salvation. He himself had little idea of the greatness of the work he was destined to do, but God had laid His hand on him, and to no vain purpose.

We have noted that Wesley returned from Germany in 1738. He lost no opportunity in getting to work. On the day after his arrival he preached three times,

## The Revival begins

afterwards expounding the Scripture to a large company in the Minories. Before long many pulpits were denied him, but this did not lessen his ardour. He had a message to deliver, and deliver it he must. From closed pulpits he went to hospitals and prisons, and was untiring in his visitation of the various Societies at this time established in London. In December of the same year Whitefield arrived from Georgia. In characteristic words, Wesley tells of the meeting: "God gave us once more to take sweet counsel together."

The year which was to see the dawn of the great revival opened with a memorable gathering at Fetter Lane—a foretaste of the wonders that were to be. The brothers Wesley, with Whitefield, and about sixty others, were present. About three o'clock in the morning, as the company continued in prayer, God's power rested mightily on them. Many cried out for very joy, others fell to the ground through intensity of feeling. When all were recovered from their awe and amazement, they broke out with one voice: "We praise Thee, O God, we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord." Whitefield says: "It was a Pentecostal season indeed." A few days later seven "despised Methodists" met at Islington, and discussed in conference several matters of great importance. They continued in fasting and prayer till an early hour in the morning. "We parted," says Whitefield, "with the full conviction that God was going to do great things among us." Two days later another remarkable gathering took place at Fetter Lane, the whole night being spent in prayer and thanksgiving. Thus opened the memorable year of 1739.

Whitefield, who was now at Bristol, was soon suffering the same lot as Wesley. Within a fortnight of his arrival in the city every pulpit was denied him; he

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was even forbidden admittance to the prison. But he remained undaunted in the determination that the people should hear his message. One Sunday when he had been preaching at Bermondsey, nearly a thousand people, unable to gain admission, had stood in the churchyard during the service. "This," says Whitefield, "put me first upon thinking of preaching without doors. I mentioned it to some friends, who looked upon it as a mad notion. However, we knelt down and prayed that nothing may be done rashly."

Whitefield's mind was now made up. If the Churches refused him he would preach in the open air. This was a bold step in those days. It was the first big break that the Methodists made with the Church. But it was the beginning of great things. Henceforth the Methodists were to put field-preaching in the foreground of their programme, and thousands were to be led to Christ through its instrumentality.

Within easy reach of Bristol lies Kingswood. Here Whitefield first preached in the open air to the colliers. The district had no place of worship, the people were "lawless and brutal, worse than heathens." Two hundred gathered round him for his first service. Whitefield felt the importance of the step he had taken. "Blessed be God," he says, "that the ice is now broke, I have taken the field. Some may censure me, but is there not a cause?" At the second service two thousand were present, and the congregations rapidly grew at each succeeding service, until they reached wellnigh twenty thousand.

Whitefield now wrote to Wesley, who was busily engaged among the societies in London, urging him to come to Bristol without delay. Arriving there towards the end of March he was amazed at Whitefield's strange way of preaching in the open air, and at first could

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scarce reconcile himself to it. All his life he had been (till very lately) so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order, that he says he should have thought "the saving of souls almost a sin, if it had not been done in a church." But Wesley's mind had not yet ceased to broaden, and this was only one of the many instances at this time of his breaking away from prejudice and custom. He was soon to follow Whitefield and take the decisive step. It was at four o'clock one Monday afternoon. "I submitted to be more vile, and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation." This entry in the journal shows that the decision cost Wesley not a little. He was now fully embarked on field-preaching. The following Sunday he again "submitted to be more vile," and attracted a crowd of a thousand persons at Bristol. In the afternoon five thousand gathered round him at Rose Green, and later fifteen hundred at Kingswood. With the exception of brief visits to London, Wales, Devonshire, and Oxford, Wesley spent the remainder of the year in Bristol, and its immediate neighbourhood.

Extraordinary scenes and effects now became frequent occurrences. These had begun before Wesley left London. On one occasion, while expounding the Scriptures, the congregation was startled to hear a woman suddenly cry out as if in the agonies of death. Such cries now became common enough, not from one but from dozens. Men and women dropped to the ground as though thunderstruck. Others violently trembled. Congregations rang with the cries of those whom the Word of God cut to the heart.

One very remarkable case was that of a weaver at Baldwin Street. This man was a zealous Churchman, and a bitter enemy of Dissent. Hearing that people fell into strange fits at Wesley services, he was anxious

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to go and see for himself. But going, he was less satisfied than ever, and after the meeting, went about among his friends till early morning, trying to convince them that it was all a delusion of the devil. The next day, when sitting down to his midday meal, he had a mind first to finish a sermon he had borrowed on "salvation by faith." But when he came to the last page he suddenly changed colour, fell off his chair, and began loudly screaming and beating himself against the ground. The startled neighbours hurried to the house. When Wesley arrived he found the room full of people. The weaver's wife had wished to keep them out, but her husband had cried out, "No, let them all come; let all the world see the just judgment of God." Fixing his eye on Wesley, and stretching out his hand, the poor fellow cried, "Ay, this is he who I said was a deceiver of the people. But God has overtaken me. I said it was all a delusion; but this is no delusion." He then roared out, "Oh, thou devil! Thou cursed devil! Yea, thou legion of devils! Thou canst not stay. Christ will cast thee out. I know His work is begun. Tear me to pieces if thou wilt, but thou canst not hurt me." He continued to beat himself against the ground, his breast heaving as in some death agony, and great drops of sweat falling from his face. Wesley and the company betook themselves to prayer, and not in vain. Soon the agony passed, and both mind and soul were set at liberty. Wesley visited the man next day, and found his voice gone, and his body as "weak as that of an infant," but his soul was in peace, full of love, and rejoicing in hope of the glory of God.

Some of these strange happenings naturally awakened a deal of criticism. That a few were unreal there can be no doubt. This was candidly recognised by Charles



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Wesley, who, whilst affirming that many were struck down, both soul and body, into the depths of distress, says, "Their *outward affections* were easy to be imitated." But in the main they were real enough. Many explanations have been given of them, more especially the bodily contortions. Some have thought that the "great mental and moral disturbance" caused by Wesley's remarkable preaching amply accounts for them. It was not that that preaching was vehement or sensational, or that it gave the least encouragement to these strange manifestations. On the contrary, it was calm and sober, logical and calculating. But it went straight to the heart and conscience. Every word was a blow to the guilty listener.

To one who had many times written to Wesley concerning this, he replied: "The question between us turns chiefly, if not wholly, on matter of fact. You deny that God does now work these effects; at least, that He works them in this manner. I affirm both, because I have heard these things with my own ears, and have seen with my eyes. I have seen (as far as a thing of this kind can be seen) very many persons changed in a moment from the spirit of fear, horror, despair, to the spirit of love, joy, and peace; and from sinful desire, till then reigning over them, to a pure desire of doing the will of God. These are matters of fact, whereof I have been, and almost daily am, an eye or ear witness. . . . I will show you him that was a lion till then, and is now a lamb; him that was a drunkard, and is now exemplarily sober; the whoremonger that was, who now abhors the very 'garment spotted by the flesh.' These are my living arguments."

Methodism was born amid persecution, and thrived on it. Practically all through Wesley's active ministry he and his helpers met with fierce opposition. Not

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only was every manner of evil spoken against them, but every effort was made to impede the progress of their work. At first the opposition was not of a serious nature, and did not go much beyond the hiring of men to interrupt by singing ballads while Wesley was preaching, or his congregation singing. But later the interruptions became more organised, developing into savage and infuriated mobs who were not content with mere interruption, but bent on doing desperate harm. Of these mobs we shall have occasion to refer in another chapter.

Wesley's encounter with Beau Nash at Bath is of peculiar interest. The town was at that time one of the most fashionable in England, and Richard Nash, commonly called "Beau" Nash, one of its most renowned characters. Nash was "an adventurer and gamester," but all Bath acknowledged his rule.

There was great excitement in the town when it became known that Nash intended to be present at Wesley's service. Evidently the people thought some fun was in store, for a greater crowd than usual was present, including many of the most wealthy and fashionable. It was an opportunity to drive home the truth Wesley was not slow to embrace. He told them plainly how that the Scripture had included them all under sin—high and low, rich and poor, one with another. Many of them were not a little surprised, and began suddenly to grow serious, when Nash appeared, and coming close to the preacher, asked him by what authority he did these things. The gathering must have presented a striking scene—the preacher of the "despised Methodists" confronted by the "swaggering rake," surrounded by the wealth and fashion of the country. But Wesley was not disconcerted. "By the authority of Jesus Christ," he replied, "conveyed

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to me by the Archbishop of Canterbury, when he laid hands upon me, and said, 'Take thou authority to preach the Gospel.'" Nash replied that the meeting was a conventicle, and therefore contrary to Act of Parliament. It was not difficult for Wesley to disprove this. The conventicles mentioned in the Act were seditious meetings, but here there was no shadow of sedition and therefore nothing contrary to the Act. "I say it is," Nash feebly replied, and foiled in this argument turned to another. "Your preaching frightens people out of their wits," he said. "Sir, did you ever hear me preach?" asked Wesley, and Nash was obliged to answer that he never did. "How then can you judge of what you have never heard?" "Sir, by common report," replied Nash. "Common report is not enough. Give me leave, sir, to ask, is not your name Nash?" "My name is Nash." "Sir, I dare not judge of you by common report," said Wesley, "I think it is not enough to judge by." This somewhat disconcerted the beau, and for a moment he was at a loss for an answer. Recovering himself, he said, "I desire to know what this people come here for?" Wesley's part in this strange scene was done. It was not he who gave the final answer to Bath's famous character, but an old woman from among the audience. "Sir, leave him to me," she cried, "let an old woman answer him. You, Mr. Nash, take care of your body; we take care of our souls; and for the food of our souls we come here." This was a ready enough answer. Nash had had more than enough. He replied not a word, but quickly left the scene.

Wesley had triumphed, and all Bath had witnessed it. When he went away, the street was full of people, anxiously inquiring, "Which is he, which is he?" But when Wesley replied, "I am he," they were immedi-

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ately silent. Arriving at his friend's house he was told by the maid that several wished to speak with him. "I believe, ladies," said he, on going to them, "the maid mistook; you only wanted to look at me. I do not expect that the rich and great should want either to speak with me, or to hear me; for I speak the plain truth—a thing you hear little of, and do not desire to hear." A few more words passed, and Wesley retired.

Wesley's societies in Bristol were increasing so rapidly that he soon found himself obliged to erect a building for their accommodation. A piece of ground was accordingly secured in the Horse Fair, and on 12th May the first stone of the first Methodist building laid "with the voice of praise and thanksgiving." Wesley, at first, appointed "eleven feoffees," but afterwards, through letters from Whitefield and others in London, cancelled the arrangements, taking the whole matter in his own hands. There were many reasons which led him to do this; but one, he says, was enough: "That such feoffees always would have it in their power to control me; and if I preached not as they liked, to turn me out of the room I had built." During the early part of Wesley's career all Methodist property was invested solely in himself. Later, he transferred it by a "deed of declaration" to his Legal Conference.

While Wesley was thus making progress in Bristol and the neighbourhood, his brother Charles and Whitefield were busily engaged in London on similar work. On Sunday, Whitefield was preaching at Moorfields, and week-days, on Kennington Common. Immense crowds, sometimes numbering from thirty to forty thousand—on horse, on foot, and in carriage—gathered to hear him. During one of Wesley's visits to London he went with Whitefield to Blackheath, expecting to

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hear him preach. Whitefield, however, to Wesley's surprise, asked him to preach the sermon, which he did, though much against his will. Whitefield makes special mention of this incident in his journal: "I had the pleasure of introducing my honoured and reverend friend, Mr. John Wesley, to preach at Blackheath. The Lord gave him ten thousand times more success than He has given me! I went to bed rejoicing that another fresh inroad was made into Satan's territories by Mr. Wesley's following me in field-preaching in London as well as in Bristol." Charles Wesley had likewise become an open-air preacher, and was doing valuable work in concert with Whitefield.

Other important events which occurred during the year 1739 will be treated in another chapter.

## CHAPTER VII

### SEPARATION FROM THE MORAVIANS AND WHITEFIELD

"I trust whereinsoever I have mistaken, my mind is open to conviction. I sincerely desire to be better informed. I say to God and man, 'What I know not, teach thou me.'"—  
WESLEY.

UNTIL now, comparative peace had reigned in the Methodist camp, but it was not to be for long. Wesley was soon in conflict, not only with the Moravians, but with Whitefield, ultimately resulting in separation from both. These controversies, especially the latter, had far-reaching effects on Wesley's future work and the Revival generally.

Wesley's relations with the Moravians had been of the closest. For nearly two years he had been working with them, and when in London never failed to visit their Society. Moreover, large numbers, who had been converted by his preaching, as also that of his brother Charles, and of Whitefield, joined themselves to their company.

When, early in 1739, Wesley left to take up the work at Bristol, the charge of affairs in London rested largely with his brother Charles. Serious troubles soon began to arise, and before long Charles was involved in unfortunate disputes with some of the Moravian leaders. As early as June of this year (1739) Wesley was urgently called to London because of great confusion that had arisen in the Society at Fetter Lane.



## Separation from the Moravians

He was able to restore things to some state of peace, but only temporarily.

Towards the end of the year, when Wesley was at Oxford, he received further urgent letters telling him of the unfortunate state of affairs in London. He was warned that the Society would be divided; that many were determined to follow the direction of one of their leaders, and raise a Church of their own. He found that the reports had not in any way been exaggerated. The sad effects of the disputes were to be seen on every side. Scarce one in ten retained their first love, and most of the rest were in utmost confusion, biting and devouring one another. Certain had come saying that "all were in a wrong way still, and had no faith at all." Faith, they declared, admitted of no degrees, and, consequently, weak faith was no faith. They denied that the gift of God, which many had received through Böhler's ministry, was justifying faith. They further asserted that the way to attain faith was "to wait for Christ, and be still." There was no need of the public means of grace, or of private prayer, or of Scripture study, or even of doing temporal or spiritual good. Such ideas were, of course, radically opposed to Wesley's, and caused him not a little uneasiness. A long interview with Molther, a Moravian minister and chief promoter of these views, bore no fruit. Wesley did his utmost in other ways to stay the controversy and restore peace, but to no purpose. The state of things grew more and more serious.

Later, finding there was no time for delay, he made up his mind to strike at "the grand delusion." Accordingly, while preaching one Sunday from the words: "Stand ye in the way, ask for the old paths," he gave an account of the marvellous work God had begun, and of the way in which the enemy had sown tares among

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the good seed. This he continued to do every day during the week, but all in vain. The following month the Society at Fetter Lane barred him from their ministry.

Matters had now reached a crisis. What was to be done? Wesley did not long hesitate. The following week he was again present at Fetter Lane; remaining silent till the conclusion of the meeting, he then rose and read a paper which, in a few sentences, dealt with the chief points of the controversy. The assertions that had been made were flatly contradictory to the Word of God. "I have warned you hereof again and again, and besought you to turn back to the law and the testimony. I have borne with you long, hoping you would turn. But as I find you more and more confirmed in the error of your ways, nothing now remains but that I should give you up to God. You that are of the same judgment, follow me." Wesley then withdrew with some eighteen or nineteen of the Society. It was a dramatic ending to a painful state of things.

It was well that Wesley struck at the root of it. He took the only course open to him. The result would have been disastrous in the extreme had it been allowed to continue. "We gathered up," Charles Wesley pathetically says, "our wreck, *Rari nantes in gurgite vasto*, floating here and there on the vast abyss, for nine out of ten were swallowed up in the dead sea of stillness. Oh, why was not this done six months ago? How fatal was our delay and false moderation!" Attempts were afterwards made by the Moravians, more especially Peter Böhler and Spangenberg, for a reunion, but nothing came of them.

Let it be remembered, however, that Wesley still retained and expressed admiration for the Moravians as a body; it was the local evils that had crept in among them in England that he could not countenance.



# John Wesley

The story of divisions among Christians is never happy reading, but out of evil good often comes. We feel that Methodism would never have exerted the great and far-reaching influence it did on the world had it been merged in the Moravian Church.

The little company, consisting of about twenty-five men and forty-eight women, now met at the Foundery. This was an old building in Moorfields formerly used by the Government for the casting of cannon. Wesley had purchased it the year previous for £115, and adapted it at considerable expense for the purpose of public worship. It remained the Methodist headquarters till City Road Chapel was built thirty-nine years later.

This controversy had scarce died away when Wesley was involved in another, more personal and so more painful. Until now, he and his brother had worked in perfect harmony with Whitefield, without discussion of particular opinions; but, before long, important doctrinal differences were to divide them, and so far as public ministry was concerned, the two great leaders of the Evangelical Revival were to separate and journey along different roads.

The trouble arose out of the Calvinistic tenet of predestination. The difficulty first confronted Wesley in concrete form when a member of one of the London societies began disputing with his brethren on the question. This man, who was a confirmed Calvinist, threatened to go and tell all the world that Wesley and his brother were false prophets. "I hold," said he, "that a certain number are elected from eternity, and they must and shall be saved, and the rest of mankind must and shall be damned. You are all wrong, and I am determined to set you right." Later, John Cennick, one of Wesley's helpers at Kingswood, publicly attacked his leader.

## Separation from the Moravians

Wesley felt that the time had come for a clear declaration of his belief on the question. He accordingly preached in Bristol his famous sermon on "Free Grace," which he afterwards published in pamphlet form. In a brief address to his readers he declares that nothing, save the strongest conviction that he was indispensably obliged to declare this truth to all the world, could have induced him to openly oppose the sentiments of those whom he so greatly esteemed for their work's sake. If any believed it his duty to reply, he begged them to do it "in charity, in love, and in the spirit of meekness." Tyerman says that the sermon presents the doctrine in all its "naked, hideous deformity; but it is fair, and no Calvinistic dexterity can make it otherwise." "The sense of it all is plainly this," says Wesley in vigorous language; "by virtue of an eternal, unchangeable, irresistible decree of God, one part of mankind are infallibly saved, and the rest infallibly damned. It being impossible that any of the former should be damned, or that any of the latter should be saved."

A copy of this sermon reached Whitefield, who was in America at the time, and caused him not a little uneasiness. Urgent letters passed to England. Whitefield's stay in America had deepened rather than lessened his belief in the Calvinistic doctrine. He wrote remonstrating with Wesley, but showing no anxiety for separation, but rather for mutual peace and understanding. Referring to an answer to the sermon he had prepared, Whitefield says: "If it occasion a strangeness between us, it shall not be my fault. There is nothing in my answer exciting to it that I know of. Oh, my dear brethren, my heart almost bleeds within me. Methinks I could be willing to tarry here on the waters for ever, rather than come to England to oppose you." This letter was written to



# John Wesley

Charles while Whitefield was on his way back to the old country.

He arrived in London in March 1741, bringing his manuscript with him. Here he met Charles. There was a deep pathos in the meeting and interview. "It would have melted any heart," says Whitefield, "to have heard us weeping after prayer that, if possible, the breach might be prevented." He submitted the manuscript to Charles, who returned it endorsed, "Put up again thy sword into its place." Whitefield however published it, and told Wesley that he was now determined to preach publicly against him and his brother wherever he went. This he did, not in a general way, but in particular, and by name.

The division thus became inevitable. Whitefield felt he must declare his convictions, and the Wesleys that they must be true to their belief. Methodism was now divided into two camps, but unfortunate as the division was, the Revival did not suffer. Some think that the division was on the whole a source of strength rather than of weakness. Clear it is that had the strife been allowed to continue, the progress of the Revival would have been materially weakened. The controversy was a painful one for Wesley, and affected him deeply. He felt that the breach was not necessary, and reconciliation might have been made. Some sharp expressions dropped from each—an inevitable result of controversy. But the friendship between the two leaders was not allowed to suffer. Clouded over for a season, it was soon renewed; and their agreement to differ Christian and courteous.

From this period then we date an important division of Methodism. There were now, as Wesley said, "two sorts of Methodists—those for particular, and those for general redemption."



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE REVIVAL EXTENDS, AND METHODISM BECOMES SYSTEMATISED

“When He first the work begun  
Small and feeble was His day :  
Now the word doth swiftly run,  
Now it wins its widening way.”—CHARLES WESLEY.

“The organisation of Methodism, which, at this time, may vie with that of any Society that has ever been instituted, for the admirable adaptation of the means to the end proposed, was slowly developed and assisted in its progress by accidental circumstances.”—SOUTHEY.

DESPITE controversy, Wesley crowded the years 1740 and 1741 with remarkable activity. London and Bristol were his two chief centres, but his work was not confined to those places. He visited among other towns, Reading, Windsor, Southampton, Leicester, Northampton, Nottingham, Oxford, and Wales. Wherever he went his coming roused curiosity and interest. At Nottingham, for instance, he preached in the market-place to an “immense multitude” of people. Only one or two behaved lightly, but when spoken to stood reproved. Soon after, however, a man standing behind the preacher began to contradict and blaspheme, but when Wesley turned to him “stepped behind a pillar, and in a few minutes disappeared.” At Cardiff he preached in the Shire Hall. There had been a feast in the town the same day, and Wesley thought it

# John Wesley

needful to add a few words on intemperance. "As for you drunkards, you have no part in this life; you abide in death; you choose death and hell." At this a man in the audience vehemently cried out, "I am one; and thither I am going." "But I trust God at that hour," says Wesley, "began to show him and others 'a more excellent way.'"

At Bristol the outward manifestations of the work became less frequent and vivid. "It was easy to observe here," says Wesley, on returning to Bristol early in 1740, "in how different a manner God works now from what He did last spring. He then poured along like a rapid flood, overwhelming all before Him, whereas now

"He deigns His influence to infuse,

Secret, refreshing, as the silent dews."

Convictions sank deeper and deeper. Love and joy are more calm, even, and steady. And God in many is laying the axe to the root of the tree, who can have no rest in their spirits till they are fully renewed in the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness."

On one occasion there was a curious interruption whilst Wesley was conducting a service at Bristol. He was preaching on "Trust ye in the Lord Jehovah; for in the Lord is everlasting strength," and was showing what cause men had to trust in the Captain of their salvation, when a man cried out, "Who was your captain the other day when you hanged yourself? I know the man who saw you when you was cut down." It seems that this extraordinary story had been circulated and actually believed by many in Bristol. Wesley asked the crowd to make way for the interrupter to come nearer, but the moment he saw the way open, he turned and made off with all possible speed, not so much as once looking behind him!

With the growth of Wesley's popularity there was



JOHN WESLEY PREACHING AT CHESTER

## John Wesley

a corresponding growth in opposition. Fierce opposition was soon encountered at Bristol. On many occasions the mobs had attempted to break up the meetings, but one day matters came to a climax. "The floods began to lift up their voice." The angry mob, shouting, cursing, and swearing, not only filled the street, but all the courts and alleys. An order sent by the Mayor that they should disperse had no effect. The Chief Constable next came in person, but he was powerless to quell the riot. The Mayor then sent several of his officers, and the ringleaders were taken into custody. When brought up at the Quarter Sessions, they excused themselves by making accusations against Wesley, but they were cut short by the Mayor: "What Mr. Wesley is, is nothing to you. I will keep the peace ; I will have no rioting in this city."

Similar opposition was encountered in London. One Sunday evening, on arriving at the Foundery, Wesley was completely closed in by the mob gathered round the door. Not in the least disconcerted, he embraced it joyfully as an opportunity to speak to those nearest to him of "righteousness and judgment to come." At first few heard because of the noise, but gradually the silence spread further till there was a quiet, attentive congregation. When Wesley left them, they all showed "much love," and dismissed him with "many blessings." Wesley never lost an opportunity of turning the crowd to good account. Shortly after he tells of another mob found round his door, who "opened all their throats" the moment they saw him. He desired his friends to go into the house, and then walking in the midst of the crowd, proclaimed "the name of the Lord, gracious and merciful, and repenting Him of the evil." The people stood staring at one another. Wesley told them they could not flee from the face of this great God, and

## The Revival Extends

besought them to cry to Him for mercy. "To this," he says, "they readily agreed; I then commended them to His grace, and went undisturbed to the little company within." On one occasion some of the mob entered the Foundery, "but those who come in among us as lions," says Wesley, "in a short space of time become as lambs." The tears trickled down the cheeks of those who at first were most loud in contradiction and blasphemy. "I wonder," says he, "the devil has not wisdom enough to discern that he is destroying his own kingdom. I believe he has never yet, any one time, caused this open opposition to the truth of God, without losing one or more of his servants, who were found of God while they sought Him not."

And so the work proceeded. But let it be remembered that whilst Wesley dealt with crowds, he did not lose sight of the individual. He was assiduous in visitation, especially of the sick. Despite the demands made on his time, nothing was too slight for his care and attention. When at Bristol, early in 1740, he received an urgent message from a young man, lying under sentence of death in a London prison, to come and visit him. The poor fellow had heard him preach in Bristol, and for a time ran well; but he fell away, and on returning to London met with old acquaintances, and under their evil influence committed a highway robbery. "I adjure him, by the living God," he wrote to a friend, "that he come and see me before I go hence." Wesley had intended to make a long stay in Bristol, but he immediately set out for London to visit this convict thief. He found the man in a penitent state, ready to make full confession of all his wrong. He admitted that before leaving Bristol he had robbed Wesley of money collected for the Kingswood school. Through Wesley's ministrations the man found forgive-



# John Wesley

ness and peace. Shortly after a reprieve was granted, and the sentence commuted to transportation for life. Whether Wesley had anything to do with the obtaining of the reprieve we cannot say. The story, however, illustrates his untiring interest in the individual.

Some attention must now be given to the earliest organisation of Methodism. We have noted that on 12th May, 1739, the stones were laid in the Horse Fair, Bristol, of the first Methodist chapel in the world; that Wesley first preached in the Foundery, London, in November of the same year, and that this building became the headquarters of Methodism till City Road Chapel was built. Another important event about this time was the coming to Wesley of certain persons, convinced of sin and desirous of redemption, for guidance and help. They found themselves surrounded by difficulties. Friends, neighbours, and acquaintances were against them. Every one sought to weaken, none to strengthen their hands. What were they to do? "Strengthen you one another," was Wesley's advice; "talk together as often as you can, and pray earnestly with and for one another, that you may 'endure to the end and be saved.'" But they said they wanted Wesley to talk with them, and give them advice. He therefore asked for their names and addresses, and said: "If you will all of you come together every Thursday, in the evening, I will gladly spend some time with you in prayer, and give you the best advice I can." "Thus arose," says he, "without any previous design on either side, what was afterwards called a *Society*." These Societies rapidly increased in numbers both in London and Bristol, and later at Kingswood and Bath.

Another important step was taken three years later—the result of financial embarrassment at Bristol—"a thing for which we have cause to bless God ever



## The Revival Extends

since," recorded Wesley. There still remained a debt on the building on the Horse Fair. Several friends met together to consider the best means of payment, when some one suggested that every member of the Society should contribute a penny a week till all was paid. It was suggested that some were poor and could not afford it. "Then," said the proposer, "put eleven of the poorest with me ; and if they can give anything, well ; I will call on them weekly ; and if they can give nothing, I will give for them as well as for myself. And each of you call on eleven of your neighbours weekly ; receive what they give, and make up what is wanting." The name of the proposer of this scheme, which afterwards became so large a part of Methodism, was Captain Foy. The Collectors were called *Leaders*, and the companies under their care *Classes*. In this way all the members received individual attention, for what was at first a purely financial arrangement developed into a systematic lay pastoral oversight, the classes meeting week by week for prayer and fellowship. This is but one of the many illustrations of the "accidental circumstances" which helped to develop and systematise Methodism.

Wesley was delighted with the turn that events had taken. "This is the very thing," he said, "the very thing that we have wanted so long." The Leaders made particular inquiry each week into the behaviour of their members, and reported to Wesley any "disorderly walkers." "It can scarcely be conceived," says he, "what advantages have been reaped from this little prudential regulation." The organisation was soon introduced in London and other places, and became a mighty spiritual force. Later each member received a ticket with a verse of Scripture on it, given quarterly by the preacher. This organisation remains unchanged in Methodism to this

## John Wesley

day, and has without doubt been largely the secret of the depth of its spiritual life and far-reaching influence.

Wesley could never have accomplished the work he did had it not been for the help given by his lay preachers. Hitherto they had been merely "Exhorters" and "Expounders" of the Scriptures—for he had a strong prejudice against a layman preaching. His first helpers had been clergymen, but they were few, and as the Revival extended and the work became more irregular, their numbers grew less rather than more. The very success of the work urged on a step Wesley was most reluctant to take.

As Southey says: "From expounding to preaching was an easy step." The first to take that step, all unknown to Wesley, was Thomas Maxfield. Maxfield had been appointed to meet the Society in London. This he did with marked success, drawing large crowds to his exhortations and address. His zeal soon carried him away, and he commenced to preach. It was not long before Wesley heard of this startling innovation, and journeyed with all possible speed from Bristol to London to make inquiries. Fortunately his mother was close at hand. She was now living at the Foundery, nearing the end, but still retaining all loving interest in her sons and their work. It was she who was to bring about the change in Wesley's point of view. "John," said this wise mother when they met, "you know what my sentiments have been; you cannot suspect me of favouring readily anything of this kind; but take care what you do with respect to this young man, for he is as surely called of God to preach as you are. Examine what have been the fruits of his preaching, and hear him for yourself." These were wise and decisive words. Wesley heeded

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them, and heard Maxfield preach. "It is the Lord," he said, "let Him do what seemeth Him good." The prejudice was broken, and the decisive step taken. Henceforth lay preachers were to take no small share in the nightly Revival which was now rapidly spreading throughout the land.

They were a noble band of men, these lay preachers—devoted, inspired, fearless. "They had," says Dr. Fitchett, "a touch of the divine patience, the courage which no terrors could shake, of the early Christian martyrs. They were saints like Francis of Assisi, dreamers like Bunyan. They had a perpetual vision of the spiritual world. . . . They had all the zeal of the preaching friars of the Middle Ages, with a better theology than they, and an infinitely nobler morality." Their history, given in the "Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers," reads like a romance, and ranks among the most precious literature of the Methodist people.

Wesley was not merely the leader of these men, but their spiritual father. The rules and discipline imposed upon them sound somewhat quaint in modern ears: "Touch no woman; be as loving as you will, but the custom of the country is nothing to you. Take money of no one; if they give you food when you are hungry, and clothes when you want them, it is enough; but not silver or gold; let there be no pretence for any one to say we grow rich by the Gospel." He impressed on them that they had nothing to do but to save souls. Therefore they were to spend and be spent on this work.

Their travels for the most part were done on horseback. Their horses were not thought unworthy of mention at the Conference. "Are all our preachers merciful to their beasts?" The "Minutes" of 1765 record the answer, "Perhaps not," and adds: "Every

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one ought (1) never to ride hard; (2) to see with his own eyes his horse rubbed, fed, and bedded."

Methodism was now by sheer force of circumstance becoming gradually systematised, and Wesley drawn along an uncalculated course by the very success which attended his labours.

## CHAPTER IX

### WESLEY IN THE NORTH

“The more labour the more blessing.”—WESLEY.

IN May, 1742, Wesley set out for the north. This was an important turning-point in his itinerancy. Hitherto he had confined his ministry to the south; the north was to open up a magnificent field of labour. On the journey he halted at Birstal and met with John Nelson, a stonemason who had been converted in a remarkable manner under his preaching at Moorfields. John, on returning to his native place, had been unable to keep his new-found faith to himself. The love of Christ had constrained his heart, and he must needs tell others of that love. His earnest, simple, pointed preaching soon attracted attention, and Wesley, on reaching the place, learned with satisfaction of the good that had been done. He preached in the open air to a large crowd of people, and spent the afternoon talking with those who had professed conversion under Nelson's preaching, and was well content to leave them under his care.

Continuing the journey he came to Newcastle, accompanied by his travelling companion, John Taylor. Taking a first walk through the town, they were astonished at what they saw and heard: “So much drunkenness, cursing, and swearing,” says Wesley “(even from the mouths of little children), do I never remember to have seen and heard before in so small a compass of

# John Wesley

time. Surely this place is ripe for Him who 'came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.'"

Early the following Sunday morning they walked down to Sandgate, the poorest and most degraded part of the town. Standing at the end of the street, they began to sing the Hundredth Psalm. Three or four people came out to see what was the matter. Soon the three or four increased to four or five hundred, and before Wesley had finished preaching, a crowd of from twelve to fifteen hundred people had gathered. He preached from the words: "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and by his stripes we are healed." The congregation was reluctant to leave. They stood gaping and staring at the preacher as if he had been a visitor from another world. The like of it they had never heard before. "If you desire to know who I am," cried he, "my name is John Wesley. At five in the evening, with God's help, I design to preach here again."

The announcement spread like wildfire. At the appointed hour the hill on which he intended to preach was covered from top to bottom. Never before had Wesley seen such an immense congregation, neither at Moorfields, nor at Kennington Common. He knew it was impossible for more than one-half to hear, although his voice was then clear and strong, but he stood so as to have the whole crowd in view as they ranged on the hill-side. Speaking from the words, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely," he made full use of the magnificent opportunity. The reception he met with was wonderful. "After preaching," he says, "the poor people were ready to tread me underfoot, out of pure love and kindness." It was some time before he could get out of the crowd and reach his inn. When at





JOHN WESLEY PREACHING FROM HIS FATHER'S TOMBSTONE

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length he succeeded, he found there several who had preceded him, and they urgently pressed him to stay at least a few days with them, or even one day longer ; but Wesley, who had promised to proceed immediately to Birstal, was unable to comply with their request. His brother, however, came shortly after, and continued the work.

Wesley returned towards the end of the year, and met what he calls the "wild, staring, loving society." A plot of ground was purchased for the erection of a preaching place, and the first stone of the new Methodist building laid on 20th December. This was the first Methodist building erected in the north. Numerous Societies were now being formed in the western and northern countries, while those in London, Bristol, and Kingswood continued to grow. Methodism was taking root, and extending in power and influence every day.

Returning from his first visit to Newcastle, Wesley visited his native place, Epworth. He had not been there for some time, so made his quarters at an inn in the middle of the town, "not knowing," he said, "whether there were any left in it now who would not be ashamed of my acquaintance." He offered his services to Mr. Romley, the curate, but he showed no eagerness for help. The church was crowded in the afternoon in the expectation that Wesley would preach. The curate was not slow to embrace the opportunity of preaching very pointedly at his distinguished hearer. Speaking from "Quench not the Spirit," he told them that one of the most dangerous ways of quenching the Spirit was by enthusiasm, and enlarged on the character of an enthusiast in a florid and oratorical manner.

Denied his father's pulpit, Wesley was not going to quit Epworth unheard. As the people were leaving

## Wesley in the North

the church, John Taylor stood in the churchyard and gave notice, "Mr. Wesley, not being permitted to preach in the church, designs to preach here at six o'clock." Epworth had never seen such a congregation. Wesley stood near the east end of the church upon his father's tombstone and cried, "The kingdom of heaven is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." He remained in Epworth several days, visiting the neighbouring villages, and preaching every evening on his father's tomb. On the Saturday "several dropped down as dead," and among the rest such a cry was heard of sinners anxious for the righteousness of faith, that Wesley could scarce hear his own voice. But many soon found that which they sought, and the cries broke into songs of thanksgiving. On the last Sunday evening of his visit, the congregation was immense. "I continued among them for near three hours," he says, "and yet we scarce knew how to part." It was on this occasion that Wesley bore the memorable testimony to the fruit of his father's labours as Rector of Epworth, mention of which has been made in an earlier chapter.

From Epworth Wesley visited Sheffield and Bristol, returning to London in July. He found his mother, who was now in her seventy-third year, nearing the end of her journey, but without doubt or fear, nor any desire but (as soon as God should call) to depart and be with Christ. The third day after his arrival he saw a change was near. "I sat down on the bedside. She was in her last conflict; unable to speak, but I believe quite sensible. Her look was calm and serene, and her eyes fixed upward, while we commended her soul to God. From three to four the silver cord was loosing, and the wheel breaking at the cistern; and then, without any struggle, or sigh, or groan, the soul was set at

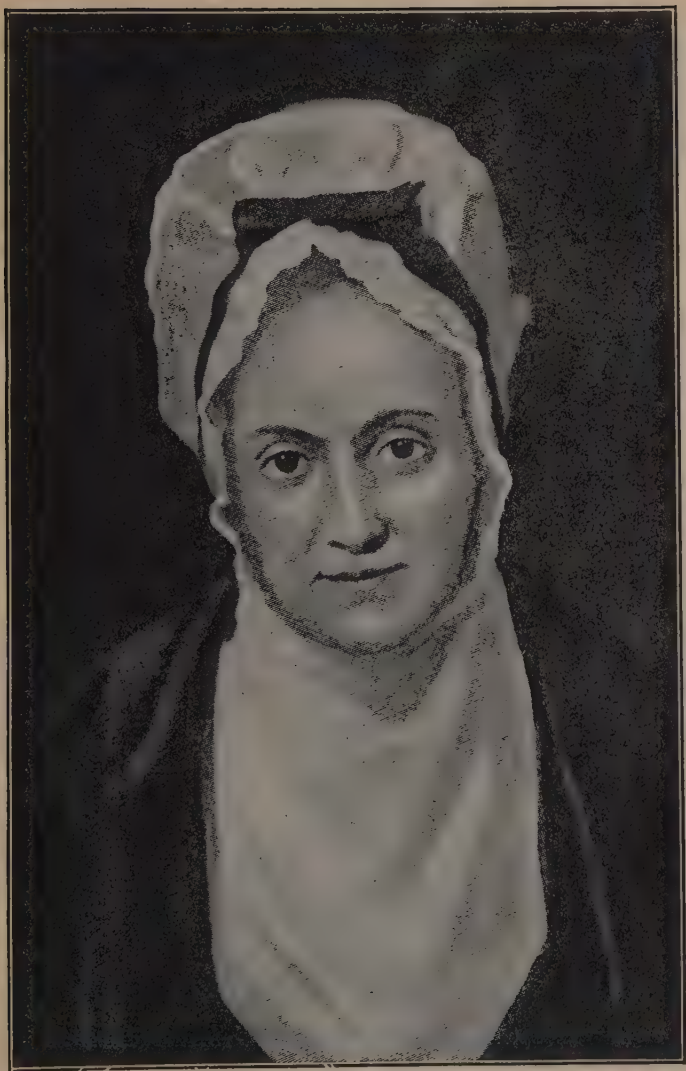
# John Wesley

liberty. We stood round the bed, and fulfilled her last request, uttered a little before she lost her speech: 'Children, as soon as I am released, sing a psalm of praise to God.'"

Wesley conducted the funeral himself, afterwards preaching over her open grave. "It was," he said, "one of the most solemn assemblies I ever saw, or expect to see on this side of eternity." Thus ended a notable and beautiful life. Susannah Wesley had had her share of earthly sorrow, but she had not been without her share of joy. She had lived to see the fruits of her devotion manifested in her sons, and the Revival firmly established in England. She had been truly, as Wesley said, "a preacher of righteousness," a preacher whose voice has not ceased from that day till this.

Early in January of the following year Wesley again visited Epworth. A strange experience befell him. He was refused the Communion, because, as the curate said, he was "not fit." "How wise a God is our God!" says he. "There could not have been so fit a place, under heaven, where this should befall me first as my father's house, the place of my nativity, and the very place where, according to the strictest sect of our religion, I had so long lived a Pharisee! It was also fit, in the highest degree, that he who repelled me from that very table, where I had myself so often distributed the bread of life, should be one who owed his all in this world to the tender love which my father had shown to his as well as personally to himself."

The next year Wesley preached for the last time before the university of Oxford. His brother Charles, who was present, said he had never seen a more attentive congregation; they did not allow a word to escape them. Some of the heads of colleges stood during the whole of the service, with their eyes intently



SUSANNAH WESLEY, THE MOTHER OF JOHN WESLEY



# John Wesley

fixed on Wesley. "If they can endure sound doctrine like this," says Charles, "he will surely leave a blessing behind him."

In 1744 the first Methodist Conference was held at the Foundery, and lasted five days. Besides the Wesleys, four other clergymen and four lay preachers were present. The day before the Conference opened, a love feast was held; and during the day the Sacrament administered to the whole of the London Society, which now numbered between two and three thousand. The Conference opened with a sermon by Charles Wesley. The spirit in which the deliberations were conducted can be learned from the following declaration which was made at the beginning of the session:—"It is desired that all things may be considered as in the immediate presence of God; that we may meet with a single eye, and as little children who have everything to learn; that every point may be examined from the foundation; that every person may speak freely whatever is in his heart; and that every question proposed may be fully debated, and bolted to the bran."

The three questions considered were:—(1) What to teach. (2) How to teach. (3) What to do—*i.e.*, how to regulate our Doctrine, Discipline, and Practice. All these points were carefully considered. The question was asked, "Can we unite any further with the Moravians?" And the answer was, "It seems not, were it only for this reason, they will not unite with us." And again, "Can we unite any further with Mr. Whitefield?" And the answer, "If he makes any overtures towards us."

During the session, the Conference was received at Lady Huntingdon's mansion, and Wesley fittingly preached from the text: "What hath God wrought?" But still greater wonders were to be wrought through the instrumentality of Methodism.



## CHAPTER X

### WESLEY'S JOURNAL

"He who desires to understand the real history of the English people during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries should read most carefully three books: George Fox's 'Journal,' John Wesley's 'Journal,' and John Henry Newman's 'Apologia pro Vitâ Suâ.'"—HUGH PRICE HUGHES.

IT is impossible within the space of this volume to follow Wesley in all his travels, or indeed in any considerable part of them. No better idea can be obtained of their extent and character than by studying his journal—"the most amazing record of human exertion ever penned." Wesley's annual record of travel for many years numbered eight thousand miles, during which it is said he seldom preached less frequently than five thousand times.

The journal is one of the most fascinating pictures we have of eighteenth-century life and manners, and the most exact and living account of the progress of the great Revival. Not only so, in it we have Wesley's own history and opinions. From no other source can we better learn the kind of man he was.

The journeys for the most part were made on horseback. It was not till 1773 that Wesley began with any regularity to ride in a carriage. Opinions differed as to his *skill* in horsemanship, but none could dispute his capacity for *hard* riding. In June, 1750, he set out about four o'clock in the morning, and was not in

# John Wesley

bed till twelve, having ridden ninety miles. "I think this was the longest day's journey I ever rode," he says. In 1759 he rode two thousand four hundred miles in seven months. In June, 1764, he states: "After travelling nearly ninety miles, I found no weariness at all; neither were our horses hurt. Thou, O Lord, dost save both man and beast."

That Wesley should become an authority on horses and their management is not surprising. It was his custom to read while riding—history, poetry, and philosophy. In his journeys, he says he marked a mistake which almost universally prevails among horsemen, and he would have them take good notice of it. How was it that no horse ever stumbled while he was reading? "No account can possibly be given but this: because then I throw the reins on his neck." To imagine that a tight rein prevented stumbling was a blunder. "A slack rein will prevent stumbling, if anything will. But in some horses nothing can."

His horses not infrequently gave him trouble. At times they fell lame and occasioned delay. Once when leaving Newcastle his beast became so lame that it could scarcely set its foot to the ground. Wesley, too, was thoroughly tired, with an aching head. "I then thought," he says, "cannot God heal either man or beast, by any means, or without any?" Immediately my weariness and headache ceased, and my horse's lameness in the same instant. Nor did he halt any more, either that day or the next. He adds, "A very odd accident." Sometimes more serious accidents happened, and life was endangered. On one journey a man galloped with full speed against him, overthrowing both rider and horse, but without any hurt to either. "Glory be to God," says he, "who saves both man and beast."

# Wesley's Journal

On one occasion when Wesley was riding in a chaise from Sunderland to Horsley, both horses suddenly took fright on the brow of a hill, and galloped down at full speed. It was not long before the coachman was thrown off the box. Strange to say, the horses safely passed a cart, and went over a narrow bridge without



WESLEY'S MARVELLOUS ESCAPE

hurt. They soon, however, left the road, galloping in the direction of a steep precipice. It seemed certain death for Wesley and those with him, but he says he felt no more fear than if he had been sitting in his study! In a most marvellous way, just as the vehicle neared the edge of the precipice, a man on horseback

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galloped in between. The other horses stopped in a moment. "Had they gone on ever so little," says Wesley, "he and we must have gone down together."

No better picture is to be found of the English mobs of the period than those given in the journal. The despised Methodists came in for a full share of persecution. We have seen how the mob treated Wesley in Bristol and London in 1740, but more serious things than these happened. In 1742, while Wesley was preaching at Long Lane, the rabble not only made all the noise they could, but violently pushed against the hearers, striking some, and breaking down part of the house. The Methodists, however, fearlessly acting on Wesley's injunction, neither stirred from their place nor answered a word. But when the rabble began to throw great stones, which forced their way through the roof, and with the tiles fell among the people, Wesley saw matters were growing serious, and that life was becoming endangered. Addressing the rioters, he said, "You must not go on thus; I am ordered by the magistrate, who is, in this respect, to us the minister of God, to inform him of those who break the laws of God and the King; and I must do it if you persist herein; otherwise, I am a partaker of your sin." His words only enraged them the more. He then said, "Let three or four calm men take hold of the foremost, and charge a constable with him, that the law may take its course." One of the ringleaders was brought, cursing and swearing, into the house. Wesley says: "I observed, when the man was brought into the house, that many of his companions were loudly crying out, 'Richard Smith, Richard Smith!' But Richard Smith answered not; he was fallen into the hands of One higher than they. God had struck him to the heart. . . . From this time we had never any considerable

# Wesley's Journal

interruption or disturbance at Long Lane; although we withdrew our prosecution, upon the offender's submission and promise of better behaviour."

On one occasion the rabble introduced a bull into the congregation. "But the beast was wiser than his drivers," says Wesley, "and continually ran either on one side of us or the other, while we sang praises to God, and prayed for about an hour." Finding themselves disappointed, the poor wretches at length forced



JOHN WESLEY APPEALING TO THE RIOTERS AT WEDNESEBURY

their way to the little table on which Wesley stood and tried to throw it over by thrusting the bull against it. When the table fell, Wesley was caught in the arms of his friends near by, while the rabble wreaked their vengeance on the table, which they tore bit from bit.

In 1743 there were strange happenings at Wednesbury. Wesley had travelled there from Birmingham, in the morning, preached at twelve, and was writing in the home of one of the Methodists, when the cry arose



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that the mob had surrounded the house. The opposition to the Methodists in Staffordshire was peculiarly fierce. "Bring out the minister," they cried; "we will have the minister." Wesley told someone to take their captain by the hand and bring him into the house. This was a favourite method with him of quelling disturbances—to secure the ringleader. A brief conversation passed between the two men, and the lion soon became as a lamb. Two more were brought in, "ready," says Wesley, "to swallow the ground with rage," but in a very short time they were as calm as their companion. Wesley then went out among the people, and standing on a chair, asked, "What do any of you want with me?" "We want you to go with us to the Justice," they cried. "That I will," replied he, "with all my heart." He then set out, followed by two or three hundred of the rioters. Some ran on before to tell the magistrate they were bringing Mr. Wesley. "What have I to do with Mr. Wesley?" said he. "Go and carry him back again." By this time the main body of the rioters had come up to the house, and were knocking boldly at the magistrate's door. He sent word that he was in bed, and advised them "to go home and be quiet." They then set out for the house of another magistrate at Walsall, but to no purpose. He, also, was in bed.

The crowd was now at a standstill. What should they do? At length they decided to convey Wesley home, but they had not gone a hundred yards before the mob of Walsall burst in upon them, and a free fight ensued. Wesley's company was tired, as well as outnumbered, so that in a short space of time the Walsall mob got the better of them, knocking down many, while others ran away. Wesley was now in the hands of fresh enemies. They dragged him along till they



## Wesley's Journal

reached the town. "Are you willing to hear me speak?" he asked. "No, no!" they cried. "Knock his brains out, down with him, kill him at once." But Wesley persisted, and spoke for about a quarter of an hour, when his voice suddenly failed him. It soon returned, however, and the wonderful man broke out aloud in prayer.

And now a strange thing happened. He who just before had headed the mob turned and said to Wesley, "Sir, I will spend my life for you; follow me, and not one soul here shall touch a hair of your head." Two or three of his companions confirmed his word, and got close to Wesley. As if by common consent, the people fell back to the right and left. "God brought me safe to Wednesbury," says Wesley, "I never saw such a chain of providences before: so many convincing proofs that the hand of God is on every person and thing, overruling as it seemeth Him good." No wonder that Charles, when he met his brother at Nottingham, after this adventure, said, "He *looked* like a soldier of Christ. His clothes were torn to tatters."

All through these exciting scenes and dangerous experiences, Wesley was perfectly calm and self-possessed, "as if," says he, "I had been sitting in my own study. . . . By how gentle degrees does God prepare us for His will. Two years ago a piece of brick grazed my shoulders. It was a year after that the stone struck me between the eyes. Last month I received one blow, and this evening two; but both were as nothing; for though one man struck me on the breast with all his might, and the other on the mouth with such a force that the blood gushed out immediately, I felt no more pain from either of the blows than if they had touched me with a straw."

The hand of God was even more visible in the Cornish riots. At Walsall, Wesley says he had many

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companions who were willing to die with him, but in Cornwall not a friend but one simple girl. "There I received some blows, lost part of my clothes, and was covered over with dirt; here, although the hands of perhaps some hundreds of people were lifted up to strike or throw, yet they were one and all stopped in the midway, so that not a man touched me with one of his fingers; neither was anything thrown from first to last, so that I had not even a speck of dirt on my clothes. Who can deny that God heareth the prayer, or that He hath all power in heaven and earth?"

Space will not permit to tell of other mobs faced by this courageous man: at Birmingham, Bolton, Derby, Dudley, Shepton Mallet, and in Ireland. Such would have intimidated most men, or at least they would have been powerless to quell them. Not so Wesley; he knew no fear, and none had greater power to stay the hand of the violent. "What do you think of him?" asked Charles of one who had been a ringleader in one of the fiercest attacks made on his brother, and who had now turned Methodist. "Think of him?" was the reply, "that he is a man of God, and God was on his side when so many of us could not kill him." Here was the secret: Wesley was a man of God, and possessed of a greater power than that of earth.

The journal gives us some interesting accounts of Wesley's interviews with famous men. "We need great graces," says he, "to converse with great people; from which, therefore (unless in some rare instances), I am glad to be excused." The "rare instances" in Wesley's case were not a few. In 1783 he records spending two hours with "that great man, Dr. Johnson." "John Wesley's conversation is good," said the distinguished conversationalist, "but he is never at leisure. He is always obliged to go at a certain hour."

## Wesley's Journal

The next year Wesley met Pascal Pasli, "probably," he says, "the most distinguished general that is now in the world." He met John Howard, and thought him to be "one of the greatest men in Europe." He paid a visit to Lord George Gordon in the Tower. The unfortunate nobleman, who had been charged with sedition and treason, twice sent urgent messages to



WESLEY'S INTERVIEW WITH LORD GEORGE GORDON IN PRISON

Wesley begging for an interview. The conversation turned on popery and religion. Wesley says he was agreeably surprised to find he did not complain of any person or thing, and expressed the hope that his confinement might take "a right turn and prove a lasting blessing to him."

The journal is a treasure house of literary notes and criticism. Wesley was a wide reader, and read with a

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purpose. History, poetry, and philosophy claimed an equal share of study. Some of his entries are very quaint. After reading the "Meditations of Marcus Aurelius," he writes: "He is doubtless one of the many who will come from the East and the West to Abraham's bosom." On riding to Newcastle he says: "I finished the tenth book of Homer. What a vein of piety runs through the whole; and yet the 'father of gods and men,' while shaking heaven with his rod, soon after uses his sister and his wife with such language as a carman might be ashamed of." He read Sterne's "Sentimental Journey," and severely criticises the title: "Sentimental. It is not English! He might as well say Continental." He read the works of Rousseau, and says of him that "such a consummate coxcomb never saw the sun." He does not seem to have had a very good opinion of the French language. "French," he says, "is the poorest and meanest language in Europe."

Art also comes in for a fair share of criticism. In 1772 he visited Hampton Court. For the most part he was pleased with everything he saw, though some of the pictures were not quite to his liking. At Bath he saw the "celebrated cartoons," and criticises them somewhat severely. "Oh, pity that so fine a painter should be utterly without common sense." He was disappointed with the famous picture in the Cathedral at Winchester, the "Raising of Lazarus." "When will painters have common sense?" he writes.

Few things escaped his keen eye. He went up and down the country, bent on a great and all-absorbing mission. The eyes of most men would have been blinded to everything not relative to that mission; but nothing escaped Wesley, not even the names of houses along the lanes he travelled! His journal is

## Wesley's Journal

crowded with clever and interesting observations about the most divers subjects.

Wesley was his own doctor, as well as that of many Methodists and others. For twenty-seven years, he says, he made anatomy and physic the diversion of his leisure hours. "I do not know that any one patient yet had died under my hands, if any person does, let him declare it with the time and circumstances." He opened dispensaries both at London and Bristol, where welcome relief was given to the suffering poor. He "advised" freely wherever he went, and not without success. At Wednesbury he found a poor woman with strong symptoms of approaching pleurisy, and prescribed an "easy, cheap, and almost infallible remedy—a handful of nettles, boiled a few minutes, and applied warm to the side." When at Lisburn, in Ireland, he says: "All the time I could spare here was taken up by poor patients. I generally asked 'What remedies have you used?' and was not a little surprised. What has fashion to do with physic? Why (in Ireland at least), almost as much as with head-dress."

The journal gives us some interesting glimpses of Wesley's habits. In 1746 he left off drinking tea and expected to find some difficulty in breaking a custom of twenty-six years' standing. The first three days his head ached, more or less, all day long, and he felt half asleep. On the afternoon of the third day his memory failed him almost entirely. In the evening he sought remedy in prayer. The next day his headache was gone and his memory stronger than ever. "And I have found no inconvenience," says he, "but a sensible benefit in several respects from that day to this."

When seventy-three years of age, Wesley says he was far abler to preach than he was at twenty-three. "What natural means," he asks, "has God used to

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produce so wonderful an effect? (1) Continual exercise and change of air, by travelling above four thousand miles in a year. (2) Constant rising at four. (3) The ability, if ever I want, to sleep immediately. (4) The never losing a night's sleep in my life. (5) Two violent fevers and two deep consumptions. These, it is true, were rough medicines, but they were of admirable service, causing my flesh to come again as the flesh of a little child. May I add, lastly, evenness of temper?"

Reference has already been made to Wesley's interest and belief in the supernatural. Few things are more clearly indicated in the journal than this. They tell of many remarkable incidents collected by him in his travels. "With my latest breath," he says, "will I bear testimony against giving up to infidels one of the great proofs of the invisible world. I mean, that of witchcraft and apparitions confirmed by the testimony of all ages."



## CHAPTER XI

### LOVE AFFAIRS AND MARRIAGE

"How know I if it is best for me to marry? Certainly better now than later; as if not now, what security that I shall then? It shall be now or not at all."—WESLEY in 1748.

IT is not true to say, as some have, that Wesley fell in love with every attractive woman he met; though, as we have already learned from his love affair in Georgia, he was not unsusceptible to feminine charm. But Miss Sophia Hopkey was not his first attachment. The following extracts from a letter addressed to Wesley at Oxford in 1727 by Robert Kirkham, a college friend, seem clearly to indicate that Wesley had some very affectionate feelings toward the writer's sister, Miss Betty, or at any rate he would have been much pleased for his friend to become his brother-in-law.

The letter begins, "With familiarity I write, dear Jack," and after reference to some unimportant matters, continues: "Your most deserving, queer character, your worthy personal accomplishments, your noble endowments of mind, your little and handsome person, and your desirable and obliging conversation, have been the pleasing subject of our discourse for some pleasant hours. You have often been in the thoughts of M. B. (Miss Betty), which I have curiously observed, when with her alone, by inward smiles and signs and abrupt expressions concerning *you*. Shall this suffice? I caught her this morning in a humble and devout

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posture on her knees. . . . Keep your counsel and burn this when perused. You shall have my reasons in my next. I must conclude, and subscribe myself, your most affectionate friend—and *brother* I wish I might write, Robert Kirkham." The letter is pointed enough. A few days after Wesley records a communication from his sister Martha, who had been eagerly expecting to hear from him: "When I knew that you were just returned from Worcestershire, where I suppose you saw your *Varanese* (Miss Betty Kirkham), I then ceased to wonder at your silence, for the sight of such a woman, so known, so loved, might well make you forget me. I really have myself a vast respect for her, as I must necessarily have for one that is so dear to you."

Nothing came of this early courtship, though the two corresponded for three years. That Wesley ardently loved Miss Kirkham there can be no doubt. Dr. Rigg thinks he would have married her had it been possible; but some insurmountable obstacle—it may have been "a stern parental decree"—made such a union impossible. The attachment came to an end in 1731.

It was while still at Oxford that Wesley began his famous correspondence with Mrs. Delany, then Mrs. Pendarves. He had met this lady at Miss Betty Kirkham's home at Stanton, in Gloucestershire. A kind of circle of platonic friendship was formed, Wesley corresponding not only with Mrs. Pendarves, but with her mother and sister as well. According to the fashion of the time they assumed fantastic pseudonyms—Wesley was "Cyrus"; Charles, "Araspes"; Betty Kirkham, "Varanese"; while Mrs. Pendarves was "Aspasia"; and her sister, "Selina." Thackeray says that Aspasia was one of the most brilliant women of her time. This most brilliant woman Wesley almost married. It seems generally agreed that she took the

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place in Wesley's thoughts which had been occupied by Miss Betty Kirkham. Many of his letters, which are of great interest, are to be found in the "Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Delany," while others were published in an early number of the *Wesleyan Magazine*. It was a remarkable correspondence, and throws a welcome light, which would otherwise never have been given, on what some one has called the "unessential Wesley."

The correspondence with Mrs. Pendarves closed in 1734. An interval of fourteen years elapsed, and Wesley was at Newcastle. Here, he quaintly says, one of his "old companions" returned—an headache, which he had never had while he abstained from animal food. It did not last for long, but during its continuance he was nursed by Grace Murray, housekeeper of the Orphan Home at Newcastle, and nurse to Wesley's preachers. She was a young widow whose husband had been drowned at sea. Converted under the ministry of Whitefield and Wesley, she laboured strenuously in the work at Newcastle.

Here is Wesley's picture of this attractive lady: "She was remarkably neat; nicely frugal, yet not sordid; gifted with a large amount of common sense; indefatigably patient, and inexpressibly tender; quick, cleanly, skilful; of an engaging behaviour, and of a mild, sprightly, cheerful, and yet serious temper; lastly, her gifts for usefulness were such as he (Wesley) had not seen equalled." This is great praise, and we do not wonder that Wesley in the end proposed to marry her. "This is too great a blessing for me," she said in amazement; "I can't tell how to believe it. This is all I could have wished for under heaven." Very soon after Wesley was obliged to leave Newcastle for the South. The night before he told Grace Murray he was fully convinced God intended her to be his wife, and expressed the hope that when they met again they

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would not have to part any more. The young widow however could not so easily part with her new love, and begged her lover to take her with him. Wesley yielded to her entreaties, and the two went together through Yorkshire and Derbyshire, where, says he, she was "unspeakably useful" to him and to the Societies.

But Wesley, all unknown, had a formidable rival. A year before Grace Murray had nursed John Bennett, one of Wesley's preachers, for twenty-six weeks in the Orphan House at Newcastle, and from that time the two had corresponded. When Wesley left Mrs. Murray, it was at Bolton, where Bennett was stationed. Imagine Wesley's surprise when shortly afterward he received a letter from Bennett, asking his consent to marry Grace Murray; and more than that, a letter from Mrs. Murray herself, saying she believed it was the will of God that such should be! Wesley was astonished, but not greatly perturbed; he wrote a "mild answer to both, supposing they were married already." But this interesting romance was not to close with such abruptness. For six months Mrs. Murray carried on a correspondence with both lovers, assuring each in turn of her whole love!

The story that follows is a long and complicated one, and space will prevent its detailed repetition here. As a picture of "masculine simplicity and feminine caprice," it would be hard to rival; no writer of fiction ever penned a stranger or more seemingly impossible romance. Weakness and irresolution characterised Grace Murray's conduct throughout. That she loved John Bennett is clear, but she also loved John Wesley, and he was more than willing to make her his wife.

Matters were brought to a climax when Wesley learned that Mrs. Murray had sent Bennett all his letters. This decided him at once. He felt the pair ought to marry, and wrote to Grace Murray saying so. But at the

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moment such was far from the widow's mind. She ran to Wesley "in an agony of tears, and begged him not to talk so unless he designed to kill her." Later, she assured him she loved him a thousand times better than ever she loved John Bennett in her life; "but I'm afraid," said she, "if I don't marry him, he'll run mad." That same night she saw Bennett, and again promised to be his wife.

What was Wesley to do? He was now more perplexed than ever. On the 6th September he put the question with all plainness: "Which will you choose?" To which Grace Murray replied, "I am determined by conscience as well as by inclination to live and die with you." She urged Wesley to marry her immediately, but he was not to be hurried. He wished first to satisfy John Bennett, and to confer with Charles. Further, he must give to all his preachers and societies his reasons for marrying, and secure their prayers. This, he thought, would take "about a year."

Here began further trouble. Charles was astonished and shocked at hearing of his brother's proposal. The thought of John marrying a woman who had once been a domestic servant was more than he could bear. It would be nothing less, he thought, than a calamity, not only for Wesley, but for all the Methodist Societies. They argued the point at some length, but John remained unchanged in his purpose. Meeting the intended bride the next morning, Charles kissed her, and said: "Grace Murray, you have broken my heart." She, however, rode with him to Newcastle. There John Bennett was waiting their arrival. It was more than Grace Murray could withstand. She fell at Bennett's feet, and begged forgiveness for treating him so badly. Within a week they were married!

Wesley felt the disappointment keenly. Four days after the marriage he wrote to a friend at Newcastle,



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and described it as the most severe trial he had had since six years old. "Yesterday I saw my friend that was, and him to whom she is sacrificed. . . . But why should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins." He freely forgave Grace Murray and John Bennett. Bennett afterwards left him, taking nearly all the members of the Society at Bolton.

There is bitter irony in the fact that when Wesley did marry he married the most unsuitable of women. A woman who, says Southey, "by her outrageous jealousy, and abominable temper, deserves to be classed in a triad with Xantippe and the wife of Job, as one of the three bad wives." This is a very exact classification, to say the least of it. In 1743 Wesley had published a tract, entitled, "Thoughts on Marriage and a Single Life." Had he written it nine years later, he would have been more definite than he was in his advice concerning the desirability of the celibate state.

On 2nd February, 1751, he made an entry in his journal to the effect that he was clearly convinced he ought to marry. "For many years I remained single, because I believed I could be more useful in a single than married state. I now as fully believe that in my present circumstances I might be more useful in a married state; into which, upon this clear conviction, and by the advice of my friends, I entered a few days after."

The lady whom Wesley married was Mrs. Vazeille, the widow of a London merchant. She had four children, and an independent fortune; but Wesley before the marriage took good care to have the money settled on herself and children, refusing to have to do with any part of it. Charles, on hearing his brother intended to marry, was "thunderstruck," not so much because the lady was Mrs. Vazeille, but that Wesley was going to marry at all.



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The marriage has been called the greatest blunder Wesley ever made. Only a few months sufficed to reveal the magnitude of the mistake. From the beginning he did not allow it in any way to interfere with his travels. He had made a compact with his wife before marriage, that he should not preach one sermon or travel one mile the less on its account. "I cannot understand," he says, "how a Methodist preacher can answer to God, to preach one sermon, or travel one day less, in a married than in a single state." At first Mrs. Wesley accompanied her husband on his preaching tours, but this did not last for long. She was of a fiercely jealous disposition, which as time went on almost grew into a disease. Wesley's work naturally brought him into relation with many women. Many of his helpers in the various institutions were women, and with them and others he carried on extensive correspondence. This only inflamed his wife's fierce passion of jealousy the more. It is said that she frequently travelled a hundred miles to spy from a window who was in the carriage with her husband when he entered a town. She would search his pockets, and open his letters, and put his private papers into the hands of his enemies. She even went so far as to interpolate words, so as to make the letters bear a bad construction. Some of these she read to her husband's enemies, others she published in the public prints. Her passion led her to even baser things, and more than once she laid violent hands on him and tore his hair. She frequently left him, but came back again in answer to his entreaties. For twenty years she harassed and vexed his life, so far as it was possible for anybody or anything to harass and vex Wesley. Finally, she made off with part of his journals and other papers. On 23rd January, 1771 he writes:

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"For what cause I know not, my wife set out for Newcastle, purposing 'never to return.' *Non eam reliqui; non dimisi; non revocabo* (I did not desert her; I did not send her away; I will not recall her)." They did, however, meet again, but her disposition had little altered. Ten years later, on 14th October, Wesley says: "I came to London, and was informed that my wife died on Monday. This evening she was buried, though I was not informed of it till a day or two after."

Thus ended the "greatest blunder" of Wesley's life. To call it a misfortune is not sufficient. Let it be admitted that Wesley did not make an ideal husband as most women account such. His whole manner and mode of life was against pleasing such a woman as Mrs. Wesley. That he was absolutely guiltless of moral offences we are perfectly sure.

It will ever remain a marvel that his marriage had not seemingly the least effect on the energy with which he pursued the work of his life, nor on his cheerfulness of spirit. Dr. Fitchett suggests that "perhaps this unconquerable serenity of Wesley's temper was an unacknowledged irritation to his wife. It was a challenge to her gift of making everybody about her miserable." Concerning Mrs Wesley, Telford says that the most charitable view is that she suffered from some mental unsoundness. "Scores of papers in her own handwriting, bearing witness to her violent temper, seem to warrant this conclusion. She had begun life as a domestic servant, and her querulous, discontented spirit under the inconvenience of itinerant life showed that she never gained any true refinement or good feeling."

## CHAPTER XII

### FURTHER PROGRESS AND EVENTS

"I am now considering how strangely the grain of mustard-seed, planted about fifty years ago, has grown up. It spread through all Great Britain and Ireland, the Isle of Wight, and the Isle of Man; then to America, through the whole Continent, into Canada, the Leeward Isles, and Newfoundland."

WESLEY in 1785.

**I**N 1747 Wesley visited Ireland. He had been preceded by one of his lay preachers, Thomas Williams, who had organised a Methodist Society of nearly three hundred members in Dublin. He reached Dublin on a Sunday, and preached at St. Mary's to "as gay and senseless a congregation" as ever he saw. He remained a fortnight, preaching and examining the Society, and was well pleased with his first impressions. He found the people in general of "a more teachable spirit than in most parts of England," but thought that on that very account they must be watched over with more care, being equally susceptible of good and ill impressions.

Shortly after, his brother Charles visited the country; but in the interval there had been strange happenings. Hitherto the Methodists had been unmolested, but soon "the roaring lion began to shake himself" as in England. The mob broke into the Chapel, dragged out the pulpit and benches, burned them in the street, and roughly handled many of the Methodists. Without a meeting-house, Charles regularly preached on

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Oxmanton Green; later, a weaver's shop was secured, and this became the Methodist headquarters. In spite of opposition, the work soon began to spread beyond Dublin. Charles remained in the country six months, his brother John returning in March, 1748.

Tyerman calculates that Wesley crossed the Irish Channel forty-two times, and spent in his different visits to the country at least half a dozen years of his life. During his early visits several leaders in London expressed their regret that he should spend so much of his time among the Irish. "Have patience," he replied, "and Ireland will repay you." Wherever he went he found attentive congregations. "What a nation is this! Every man, woman, and child, except a few of the great vulgar, not only patiently, but gladly suffer the work of exhortation." He had, however, reason to alter his opinion later. "The waters," said he, "spread too wide to be deep." But the work prospered, and Wesley's prophecy was fulfilled. Many Societies were organised, that at Dublin becoming especially large—larger than at any other place save London.

Ireland has given to Methodism some of its noblest sons, among them being Thomas Walsh, Adam Clarke, and Henry Moore. Walsh was one of Wesley's converts. A man of fine character and devotion; he became the "apostle of Methodism" in his own country. Southey pays him a high tribute, and says, "His life proved to the Catholics that there were other saints beside their own."

Wesley's success in Ireland is the more striking when the stronghold of Roman Catholicism is remembered. Though not blind to their faults, he loved the Irish people. He declared he had seen as real courtesy in their cabins as could be found in St. James' or the Louvre. He paid his farewell visit less than two years

## Further Progress and Events

before his death, when past eighty years. There were many touching farewells, for the Irish people had learned to love him. "One and another fell on their knees all around me, and most of them burst into tears and earnest cries, the like of which I have seldom heard, so that we scarce knew how to part."

In 1751 Wesley visited Scotland for the first time. Methodism had been introduced into Dundee and Musselburgh by dragoons of John Haime's regiment. He went at the earnest invitation of a military officer stationed at the latter place. Whitefield thought that in Scotland his Arminian principles would "leave him nothing to do but to dispute from morning till night." Wesley replied that he would studiously avoid controverted points, and according to his custom keep to "the fundamental truths of Christianity." He preached at Musselburgh, where the people remained "as statues from the beginning of the sermon to the end." He rode on to Edinburgh, and describes it as "one of the dirtiest cities he had ever seen, not excepting Colen in Germany." A bailiff of the town came with an elder of the kirk and urged him to stay with them some time, or at least two or three days longer. This, however, was impossible, for Wesley had other pressing engagements. He promised that his companion, Christopher Hopper, should return. This Hopper did, and preached to large congregations.

The progress made by Methodism in Scotland was not rapid. Whenever and wherever Wesley went, he appears to have been well received; there were neither mobs nor insults, but he found the people cold and wanting in feeling—at least he thought them to be. They were not unwilling to listen to him, indeed he had seldom met with more attentive congregations. One Sunday more than a thousand people listened to

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him in a shower of rain, and at his last sermon the field in which he preached was filled from side to side with a crowd all attention. But somehow there was no grip. At Glasgow he preached on the Old Green to a congregation "the greatest part of whom *hear* much, *know* everything, and *feel* nothing." There are many entries in the journal similar to this. He "admired" the people at Dundee; they were "so decent, so serious, so unconcerned." It indeed became quite a problem "why the hand of the Lord, who does nothing without a cause, was almost entirely stayed in Scotland."

There is something to be said on the other side. It has been pointed out that the Scots were far better educated than either the English or Irish. They were Presbyterians and theologians, and most of them Calvinists. This perhaps would partly account for their seeming coldness to Wesley's appeal. However, Methodism accomplished much good in Scotland, though the Societies formed were not large; and when in 1772 Wesley renewed his visits, the magistrates of Perth, as a token of their respectful regard, conferred on him the freedom of the City.

Methodism was now spreading rapidly. Wesley never slackened his labours. In 1770 a membership of 29,406 was reported, with a hundred and twenty-one preachers.

The year previous, two preachers, Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor, had gone to America, and here Methodism began to make rapid strides. Further help was called for at the Conference of 1771, and Francis Asbury and Richard Wright volunteered. Asbury has been called the "Wesley of America." For forty-five years he travelled the American States, seldom doing less than five thousand, and often more than six thousand miles a year, and this for the most part on horseback. He bravely stayed at his post, and





CITY ROAD CHAPEL, WITH THE MONUMENT RECENTLY ERECTED

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was the only one of Wesley's English preachers left in America in 1777. There were then thirty-four itinerant preachers, called out of America itself, and a membership of nearly seven thousand.

Wesley took an important and far reaching step in 1784. During the War of Independence many of the clergy returned to England, or ceased to officiate, so that the Societies were left without adequate ministrations. Four years previous he had applied to the Bishop of London, pressing him to ordain a man who might supply the urgent need, but the request was not granted. Matters were growing serious; the American Societies were increasing, and it was clear that something must be done.

Wesley took the decisive step by ordaining Dr. Coke as "Superintendent" or bishop over the American Societies. Francis Asbury was also ordained, and set apart as bishop. He says that he had long been convinced that bishops and presbyters were the same order, and consequently had the same right to ordain. For many years he had been urged to exercise this right, but had refused, not only for the sake of peace, but because he was determined as little as possible to violate the established order of the national Church to which he belonged. But the case was widely different between England and North America. In England there were bishops who had a legal jurisdiction. In America there were none, neither any parish ministers, so that for some hundred miles together there was none either to baptise or administer the Lord's Supper. "Here, therefore," he said, "my scruples are at an end; and I conceive myself at full liberty, as I violate no order, and invade no man's right, by appointing and sending labourers into the harvest." In this way were the American Societies formed into a Church. The step

## Further Progress and Events

taken by Wesley was more than justified. Asbury died in 1816; at that time there were 211,000 Methodists in America, and more than 700 itinerant preachers.

Other ordinations followed. In 1785 three preachers were set apart to minister in Scotland. The year following there were ordinations for Antigua and Newfoundland, and in 1789 ordinations for England. Charles was not a little troubled at the step his brother had taken. He was not yet rid of his High Church theories, and to him the ordinations were schism. He wrote a pathetic letter to his brother, urging him to stop and consider before he had quite broken down the bridge. "Alas! what trouble are you preparing for yourself, as well as for me, and for your oldest, truest, best friends! . . . If your sons have no regard for you, have some for yourself. Go to your grave in peace; at least suffer me to go first before this ruin is under your hand. So much I think you owe to my father, my brother, and to me, as to stay till I am taken from the evil."

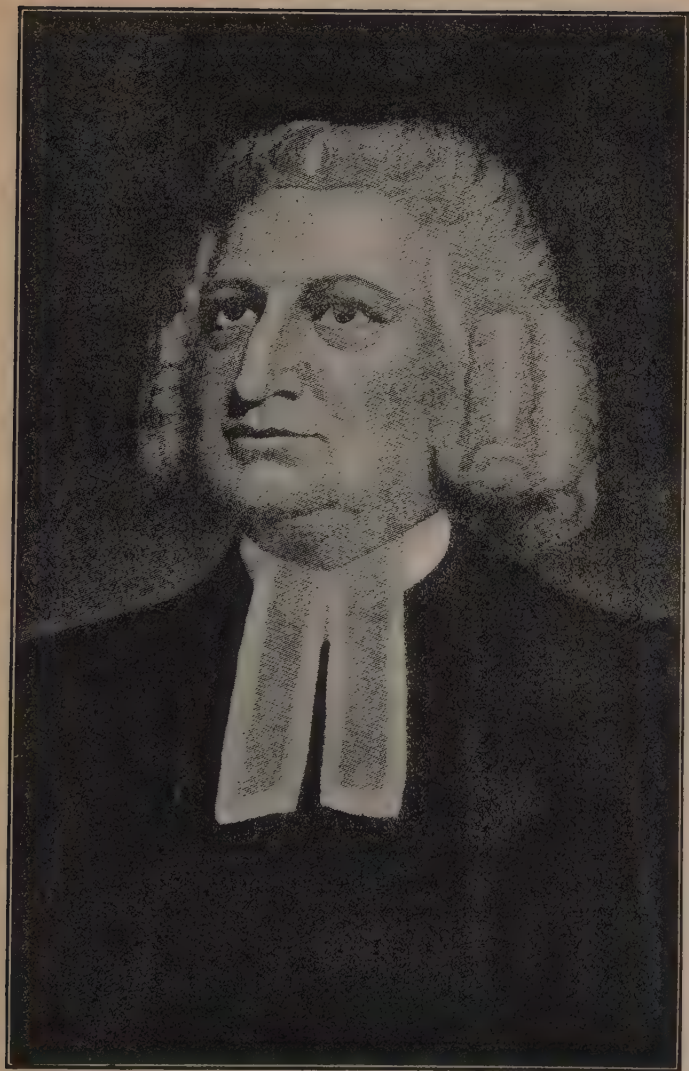
Wesley's Deed of Declaration, whereby the Conference became legally constituted, was executed in 1784. Right had been claimed by the trustees of the Chapel at Birstal to appoint preachers for that Chapel after Wesley's death. The Deed of Declaration made such impossible. It contained the names of one hundred preachers who were to form the Conference, and these alone had the right to make appointments. This was an exceedingly important step in the history of Methodism. "Without some authentic Deed fixing the meaning of the term," says Wesley, "the moment I died the Conference had been nothing. Therefore any of the proprietors of the land on which our preaching-houses were built might have seized them for their own use; and there would have been none to hinder them, for the Conference would have been *nobody*—

## John Wesley

a mere empty name. You see, then, in all the pains I have taken about this absolutely necessary Deed, I have been labouring not for myself, but for *the whole body of Methodists, in order to fix them upon such a foundation as is likely to stand as long as the sun and the moon endure.*"

We must now return to the year 1770. On 30th September George Whitefield died in America. To the end his life was crowded with labour. "I had rather *wear* out than *rust* out," he said. He certainly did not rust out. The day before he died he preached for two hours in the open air. To a friend who told him he was more fit to go to bed than preach, he replied, "True," and then added, "Lord Jesus, I am weary *in* Thy work, but not *of* Thy work." The same day he left for Newburyport, where it was expected he would preach on the morrow. While at supper at his host's house, the pavement in front, and even the hall, were crowded with people anxious to hear a few words from the great preacher. Whitefield was utterly worn out. "Brother," said he to one of the clergymen with him, "you must speak to these dear people; I cannot say a word." He took a candle and hastened to his room. But he could not resist the appeal. On the stairs he paused and spoke to the expectant and eager crowd, till the candle in his hand burned away in its socket. It was his last appeal. At six o'clock the next morning he joined the company of heaven.

Wesley preached his funeral sermon at the Tabernacle in Tottenham Court Road. There was an immense throng of people. "It was an awful season," he says; "all were still as night. Most appeared to be deeply affected, and an impression was made on many which one would hope will not speedily be effaced."



CHARLES WESLEY



# John Wesley

In 1777 the foundations were laid of City Road Chapel. For nearly forty years the Foundery had been the Methodist headquarters, but this had long been inadequate. The first stone of the new premises was laid by Wesley himself. "The rain befriended us much," he says, "by keeping away thousands who purposed to be there. But there was still such multitudes that it was with great difficulty I got through to lay the first stone." The building was opened the following year. Wesley, with his staff of helpers, lived in the house on the south side of the Chapel.

In 1788 Charles Wesley passed to his reward. He had long ceased to itinerate, confining his labours chiefly to London and Bristol. He had taken a full share in the work of the Revival, and is to be counted among its choicest spirits. As a preacher, it is said that he was more eloquent than his brother, but he lacked his brother's legislative talent. Spurgeon says that Charles was "the great poet of Methodism, while his brother was the great politician of it and framer of its rules." At the very hour of his death Wesley was away in Staffordshire singing with his congregation Charles' hymn—

"Come, let us join our friends above  
That have obtained the prize."

He passed away with "unshaken confidence in Christ which kept his mind in perfect peace." Calling his wife to his bedside, and requesting her to take a pen, he dictated his last lines—

"In age and feebleness extreme  
Who shall a sinful worm redeem?  
Jesus, my only hope Thou art,  
Strength of my failing flesh and heart;  
O could I catch a smile from Thee,  
And drop into eternity!"



## CHAPTER XIII

### APPEARANCE AND CHARACTERISTICS

"The face is of the Miltonic type. The nose is prominent and well defined. The eyes are large and reflective. . . . The well-modelled mouth is firm without sternness. . . . Power of thought is shown in the widely spread eyebrows and the ample and slightly tapering forehead. . . . The square jaw and slightly projecting chin add strength and energy to the whole."—REV. RICHARD GREEN (Description of Williams' portrait of Wesley).

FEW men ever saw Wesley without being struck by his appearance. Some great men disappoint when seen face to face; but not so John Wesley. It is said that many prejudiced against him were known to change their minds the moment they were introduced into his presence. Indeed, one young man was led to think on the error of his way by a look at Wesley's face. He had gone to scoff and ridicule. He never *heard* the great preacher, but the face, so full of "solemnity and benignity," followed him for many a day, and ultimately became the means of his conversion. He afterwards joined the Society and became a useful class leader.

The numerous paintings and engravings have made Wesley's features and figure familiar enough. Like all the Epworth family, he was short of stature—about five feet six inches; he was spare and slim, but muscular and wiry. This is the picture of him as seen by his contemporaries: "A clear, smooth forehead, and aquiline nose, an eye the brightest and most piercing that can

## John Wesley

be conceived, and a freshness of complexion scarcely ever to be found at his years, and expressive of the most perfect health. In his countenance and demeanour there was a cheerfulness mingled with gravity ; a sprightliness which was the natural result of an unusual flow of spirits."

One who knew him well describes his face as expressive of an "habitual gaiety of heart which nothing but conscious innocence and virtue could have bestowed." He says: "He was in truth the most perfect specimen of moral happiness I ever saw, and my acquaintance with him has done more to teach me what a heaven upon earth is implied in the maturity of Christian piety than all I have elsewhere seen or heard or read, except in the sacred volume." This cheerfulness of Wesley's must have been very real, for it is noticed by all his contemporaries. Mr. Bradburn, who travelled with him thousands of miles, and lived five years in his family, says: "I never saw him low-spirited in my life, nor could he endure to be with a melancholy person." Wesley himself says that he never suffered from lowness of spirits for one quarter of an hour since he was born. He had indeed learned the gentle art of living.

We have already quoted from Green's description of Williams' portrait of Wesley. The summary is worthy of notice. "The entire aspect is peaceful and at rest, grave without sadness, without agitation, or sign of fear or weakness, calm and even majestic in its consciousness of strength, but free from foible and vanity ; it shows great reserve of power, and capability withal of quivering emotion. It is the face of one having large sympathies, busied with great thoughts, moved by great purposes."

In dress Wesley was exact and neat. He wore a

## Appearance and Characteristics

narrow, plaited stock, small upright collar to his coat, no buckles at his knees, nor any silk or velvet in any part of his dress. The whole presented an air of neatness and cleanliness. This habit he tried to instil wherever he went. "God bless you, Mr. Wesley," cried a girl as he was passing down a street in Derbyshire. "Young woman," answered the neatly attired preacher, "your blessing would be of more value if your face and apron were cleaner."

He expected not only his preachers, but their wives, to set a good example in this. "A preacher's wife should be a pattern of cleanliness in her person, clothes, and habitation. Let nothing slatternly be seen about her, no rags, no dirt, no litter." He would have the Methodists learn from the Quakers in matters of cleanliness. "Mend your clothes, or I shall never expect you to mend your lives," was sound philosophy. "Let none," he said, "ever see a ragged Methodist." He was equally neat and orderly in all his habits. "In his chambers and study, during his winter months of residence in London, not a book was misplaced or even a scrap of paper left unheeded."

John Morley, in his "Life of Gladstone," asks, "How many of a man's days does he really live?" And he goes on to point out that, however men may judge the fruit it bore, Mr. Gladstone lived in vigorous activity every day through all his years. Such could be said with equal truth of Wesley. He lived in vigorous activity every day of his long life. "Leisure and I have taken leave of one another. I propose to be busy as long as I live." And he was. Someone has suggested that these words reveal the secret of Wesley's power. They are certainly one of the secrets. "Thou, O God, sellest all good things at the price of labour," says Leonardo. Many good things came to Wesley at

## John Wesley

that exacting cost. The man had a perfect genius for industry. He was once tempted to stay too long gazing at a lovely landscape. "I believe there is an eternity," he cried, "I must arise and go hence." He was always arising and going; and yet, although ever in haste, he was never in a hurry. One day his carriage was delayed beyond the appointed time. He had put up his papers and left the house. While waiting at the door, he was heard to say by someone near him, "I have lost ten minutes for ever!"

The work that Wesley was enabled to do will ever remain a marvel—a miracle of human endurance, accomplished by powers other than human. He himself gives the only adequate explanation—"Is anything too hard for God?"

And let it be remembered the work was done despite illness. True, as Lecky says, "he was gifted with a frame of iron, and with spirits that never flagged," but he was not immune from the many ills that flesh is heir to.

Mr. Gladstone's name has been mentioned. In 1853 he recorded "eight or nine days of bed illness, the longest since I had the scarlet fever at nine or ten years old;" and his biographer adds, "It was the same all through." But it was not so with Wesley; his active work was frequently interrupted by illness. In the autumn of 1753 the doctor feared he would die of consumption. He was too ill to preach, but not to work. He began to prepare his "Notes on the New Testament"—"A work which I should scarce ever have attempted," he says, "had I not been so ill as not to be able to travel or preach, and yet so well as to be able to read and write."

It was during this illness that he wrote his own epitaph, "to prevent vile panegyric":—

# Appearance and Characteristics

HERE LIETH THE BODY

OF

JOHN WESLEY,

A BRAND PLUCKED OUT OF THE BURNING ;

WHO DIED OF CONSUMPTION IN THE FIFTY-FIRST YEAR

OF HIS AGE,

NOT LEAVING, AFTER HIS DEBTS ARE PAID,

TEN POUNDS BEHIND HIM :

PRAYING,

GOD BE MERCIFUL TO ME, AN UNPROFITABLE SERVANT !

Wesley was the most generous and self-denying of men. We have already had occasion to refer to his practice while at Oxford. All his life he lived with rigid economy, giving away not merely a certain part of his income, but the whole surplus. It is calculated that in the course of fifty years he gave away more than thirty thousand pounds. Tyerman gives us some interesting details of his income. He received thirty pounds a year from the London Society; the country Methodists occasionally, but not often, paid his travelling expenses. To this is to be added the profits, which were considerable, from his publishing and book concern. It was of course from this latter source that his private charities were drawn.

He had much to say to the Methodists concerning the right use of money. A gentleman (a Methodist) once remarked to him, "I shall leave forty thousand pounds to my children." "Now suppose," says Wesley, "he had left them but twenty thousand, and given the other twenty thousand to God and the poor, would God have said to him, 'Thou fool' ? And this would have set the Society far above want." Commenting on the death of one of his preachers, whose clothes, linen, and woollen stockings, hat and wig were not thought sufficient to pay his funeral expenses, which

## John Wesley

amounted to one pound seventeen shillings and three-pence, and whose sole possession was one shilling and fourpence, he says : " Enough for any unmarried preacher of the Gospel to leave to his executors." On one occasion the Accountant-General wrote for an inventory of his plate, in order that the amount of duty to be paid might be fixed. Wesley sent the following laconic reply :—" Sir, I have two silver teaspoons in London, and two at Bristol. This is all the plate which I have at present, and I shall not buy any more while so many around me want bread.—I am, sir, your most humble servant, JOHN WESLEY."

That Wesley was splendid company and an agreeable conversationalist, no less an authority than Dr. Johnson affirms. But he was agreeable in the homes of the humble as well as the great. The Methodist people everywhere loved to entertain their great leader. Always attentive and courteous, there was nothing of the abstraction of the scholar about him. He had the gift of being able to accommodate himself to every kind of company. Old and young delighted in his rich store of anecdotes and interesting observations. Into every home he brought the most gracious influence; few would ever forget the benedictions of his visits.

It has been said that Wesley did not understand children; whether he understood them or no, he loved them and was their friend. "I reverence the young," he said, "because they may be useful after I am dead." And the young revered Wesley; after preaching they would crowd round him, and not be content till he had shaken hands with each of them. They eagerly looked forward to his visiting their homes. One, who knew him as a boy, told how he was in the habit of stopping at his father's house when on his travels. Early one morning he went up to him, and in order to attract



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attention, pulled his dressing gown. He was sharply reproved by his father, but the great preacher put his hand on the little one's head, and said, "Suffer little children to come unto Me," and then took him in his arms and blessed him. "Spend an hour a week with the children," he counselled his helpers, "whether you like it or not. Talk with them every time you see any at home." He greatly rejoiced in the rise and progress of Sunday Schools, and did all in his power to further their interests.

That Wesley had a sense of humour is evident from his journal. It is shown too by his habitual cheerfulness and freedom from worry. He was saved much trouble by being able to see the humorous side of things. Thomas Walsh once complained in a letter to him that, among the "three or four persons that tempted him to levity, you, sir, are one by your witty proverbs." Two or three fanatics came to see him one day and said, "You are not born again; the thing is very easily done, and we are going to stop this morning and regenerate you before we go." "If you want to wait," replied Wesley, "you may wait; I will show you in; this way." He took them to the door of the chapel, and having got them in, shut it and kept them there till their courage and ardour had abated!

On one of his journeys he overtook a "serious man," and immediately fell into conversation with him. "He presently gave me to know what his opinions were, therefore I said nothing to contradict them. But that did not content him. He was quite uneasy to know 'whether I held the doctrines of the decrees as he did;' but I told him over and over 'We had better keep to practical things, lest we should be angry at one another.' And so we did for two miles, till he caught me unawares and dragged me into the dispute before I knew where I was. He then grew warmer and warmer; told me

## John Wesley

I was rotten at heart, and supposed I was one of John Wesley's followers. I told him 'No, I am John Wesley himself.' Upon which—

“*Improvisum aspris Veluti qui sentibus anguem  
Presset*”—

he would have gladly run away outright. But, being the better mounted of the two, I kept close to his side and endeavoured to show him his heart till we came into the street of Northampton.” That Wesley enjoyed this we do not doubt.

A certain man named Michael Fenwick, who used occasionally to accompany Wesley on his travels, was much annoyed because his name was never mentioned in the published journal. One day he complained of this to Wesley. The error was soon rectified, for in the next issue Wesley wrote: “I left Epworth with great satisfaction, and about one preached at Clayworth. I think none were unmoved but Michael Fenwick, who fell asleep under an adjoining hayrick.”

He had the gift of repartee, which sometimes was not unsevere, but only when deserved. “Sir,” said a blustering, low-lived man, who attempted to push against him and throw him down,—“Sir, I never make way for a fool.” “I always do,” replied Wesley, stepping aside and calmly passing on. Under different circumstances he meted out different treatment. At Dewsbury an angry man pressed through the crowd and struck him violently on the face with the palm of his hand. Wesley, with tears in his eyes, remembering his Master, turned to him the other cheek. The man was thunderstruck, and slunk back into the crowd. He became a friend to the Methodists, and in later years imperilled his life to save one of the chapels from being destroyed by fire.

Wesley's habit of early rising is well known. Without it, he said, neither soul nor body can remain long

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in health. Healthy men require about six hours' sleep; healthy women, a little above seven, in four-and-twenty. "If any one desires to know exactly what quantity of sleep his own constitution requires, he may very easily make the experiment which I made about sixty years ago. I then waked every night about twelve or one and lay awake for some time. I readily concluded that this arose from my being in bed longer than nature required. To be satisfied I procured an alarum which waked me the next morning at seven, near an hour earlier than I rose the day before, yet I lay awake again at night. The second morning I rose at six; but, notwithstanding this, I lay awake the second night. The third morning I rose at five; but, nevertheless, I lay awake the third night. The fourth morning I arose at four, as, by the grace of God, I have done ever since; and I lay awake no more." It must be remembered that he was always able to sleep at command, and for many years slept during odd intervals during the day.

Wesley has sometimes been charged with credulity and ambition. That he was credulous is not to be denied; the journal seems sufficient evidence of that. But, as it has been pointed out, it must not be imagined that he believed all the strange stories and incidents related in his journal. He had a great and overwhelming belief in the supernatural, and this naturally coloured his life and thought. Southey has been chiefly responsible for the charge of ambition. He lived, however, to see his mistake, and promised to rectify it when another edition of his book was published. But this was never done by Southey himself. Wesley had ambition, but it was for the kingdom of God, and that alone. There was nothing of earth in its inspiration. He had heard the Divine voice and must needs obey. "*I must work the works of Him that sent me.*"

## CHAPTER XIV

### PREACHER, WRITER, AND SOCIAL REFORMER

"Wesley the Evangelical preacher, not Wesley the ritualist priest, is the founder of Methodism."—DR. RIGG.

"By way of his return to the New Testament conception of God, and of intrinsic religion, Wesley made a decided and prophetic approach to the social ideal of Jesus."—DR. CLIFFORD.

TO this day ministers of the Wesleyan Methodist Church are often called "Methodist preachers." Wesley was essentially a preacher, and it was by preaching that the Revival flourished. What manner of preacher was this man who could produce such mighty effects—effects which to this day remain a universal, and almost inexplicable marvel? And wherein lay the secret of his "electrical and overwhelming power?"

We are told that his attitude in the pulpit was "graceful and easy, his action calm and natural, yet pleasing and expressive; his voice not loud, but clear and manly; his style neat, simple, and perspicuous, and admirably adapted to the capacity of his hearers." Horace Walpole heard him preach at Lady Huntingdon's chapel at Bath in 1766, and pictured him, "A clean, elderly man, fresh coloured, his hair smoothly combed, but with a little soupçon of curl at the end. Wonderfully clever, but as evidently an actor as Garrick." With this comparison with Garrick we cannot agree.

## Preacher, Writer, and Reformer

Wesley was not dramatic in the pulpit. "Unlike Whitefield he had no pictorial power or dramatic inspiration, nor had he, like the same great preacher, a special power of effusive pathos." But he had an unrivalled intensity of earnestness which more than made up for anything he lacked in dramatic and pictorial power.

Remarkable force of argument characterised his preaching. He had a mighty power to reason and convince; to this was added rare simplicity of style, and complete frankness of expression. But there was something more. His sermons brought men face to face not merely with well-reasoned truth, but with the living God. "Woe is me, for I am undone . . . for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." This is the only adequate explanation that can be given of those strange and remarkable scenes of which the journal tells on almost every page.

"This is what makes him the crowd-drawing preacher,  
There's a background of God to each hard-working feature."

Wesley's personality is a factor to be reckoned with. The strength of that personality was immediately felt by all who came within range of his presence or voice. There was something about the preacher's gaze that men had seldom, if ever, seen before. An impressiveness about his whole appearance and bearing that was unique, and sometimes almost awe-inspiring. "A man would enter his congregation with his hat on his head, fully determined to put him to silence, but his countenance would change as he encountered the keen eye that seemed to pierce to the depths of his being." This also is some explanation of Wesley's remarkable power and influence over the mobs he encountered. Men instinctively felt him to be possessed of some uncommon and extraordinary power.

## John Wesley

We have already had occasion to mention John Nelson in these pages. He, perhaps, gives us the most striking picture we have of Wesley as a preacher. "As soon as he got upon the stand, he stroked back his hair, and turned his face towards where I stood, and I thought fixed his eyes upon me. His countenance fixed such an awful dread upon me, before I heard him speak, that it made my heart beat like the pendulum of a clock; and when he did speak, I thought his whole discourse was aimed at me. When he had done I said, 'This man can tell the secrets of my heart; he hath not left me there; for he hath showed the remedy, even the blood of Jesus.' I thought he spoke to no one but me, and I durst not look up, for I imagined all the people were looking at me. . . . But before Mr. Wesley concluded his sermon he cried out, 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.' I said, 'If that be true I will turn to God to-day.'" Well might Nelson say he thought the preacher spoke to no one but himself. It was ever so. Each man thought he spoke to him alone, and the appeal was irresistible. "If that be true"—and men were led to believe it *was* true—"I will turn to God."

Sermon readers are familiar with Wesley's written "Sermons," but it must be remembered they are altogether different in character from those he preached. These must often have been delivered with little or no preparation, and were made to suit the occasion and circumstance. He could be brief if the occasion demanded, but occasion often demanded length. For instance, at Stanley, near Gloucester, he says: "I was strengthened to speak as I never did before; and continued speaking near two hours, the darkness of



## Preacher, Writer, and Reformer

the night and a little lightning not lessening the number, but increasing the seriousness of the hearers." On another occasion he spoke on the Beatitudes for three hours. For the most part, especially in the last years of his life, his sermons were short, seldom more than half an hour. It is said that during his half-century of itinerant life he preached more than forty thousand times. "He often appeared in the pulpit thoroughly exhausted with labour and want of rest, but wherever he was he made it a point to preach if he could stand upon his legs."

What opportunity had a man like this for literary work? There can be little doubt that he had talents and gifts which would have enabled him to attain considerable reputation as a writer, had he so desired it. He was a student, a scholar, a tireless reader. "He shows remarkable literary power," says Leslie Stephen; "but," he adds, "we feel that his writings are means to a direct practical end, rather than valuable in themselves, either in form or substance." The former statement, at any rate, is true—all Wesley's writings were a means to a direct practical end. He sought neither fame nor money—but usefulness. They were simply a part, which he felt under compulsion to do, of his great service for humanity. This part, however, is not to be underestimated. Many complaints are made of the literature of to-day; it is pure enough compared with the literature of Wesley's day. Most of his work was issued at a price which put it within reach of the poorest. He was among the first to realise the immense importance of popular literature. In all he published nearly three hundred volumes (translated or abridged) dealing with such diverse subjects as theology, biography, history, philosophy, poetry, fiction,

## John Wesley

grammar, and medicine. How he found time to do it will ever remain a marvel.

Among his most important original works are the "Journals," "Sermons," "Notes on the New Testament," "Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion," and the "Treatise on Original Sin." The "Sermons" had an enormous circulation, and with the "Notes on the New Testament" form the doctrinal standard of Methodism to-day. These were intended to be a kind of "Manual of Divinity" for the Methodist people. Brevity and conciseness characterised all his writings. He said everything in the fewest words possible, and words well chosen. "I dare no more write in a fine style than wear a fine coat," he wrote in 1788. "A man with one foot in the grave must waste no time in ornament. But were it otherwise, had I time to spare, I should still write just as I do. I should purposely decline what many admire—a highly ornamented style. I cannot admire French oratory. I despise it from my heart."

Wesley, in the way he used the printing press, was many years in advance of his age. It undoubtedly enabled him to reach and influence a far greater number of people than he otherwise could have done, and was of immense service in forwarding the cause of the Revival.

Was Wesley a socialist? He has been claimed as such by ardent socialists, while others hold he would be were he living to-day. It all depends on what is meant by a socialist; until we can get at some more generally accepted definition of that much used word, the question will remain undecided. The other side has recently been very clearly put by Professor Faulkner in an article in the *London Quarterly Review*. That Wesley was a socialist he denies entirely, nor will he allow that he

## Preacher, Writer, and Reformer

had any social programme. He does not find that he brought forward any new views of society or political economy, or that he had thought out what Christianity really demands, if radically carried out, in the reconstruction of human relations. "But," says he, "he was a wide-minded man, with a broad outlook, who took intense interest in everything which touched humanity, with great ethical passions, with intense enthusiasm not only for saving men, but for enlarging their lives on all sides." This, perhaps, with the statement made by Dr. Clifford, quoted at the head of this chapter, is nearest the truth.

This broad-mindedness and intense interest in everything which touched humanity is shown in all Wesley's writings. They reveal him to be something more than an evangelist, whose only thought was the salvation of men's souls. True, this was his main concern, but his eyes were not blinded to the need of remedying those things which proved an hindrance to the great work he had in hand. Again and again he makes intelligent and sympathetic allusions to the social conditions of the people. In 1773 he wrote a little pamphlet, entitled "Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions." He describes vividly the poverty of the country. He had met a starving woman, who had been glad to make a meal off a bone her dog found. "And this," he says, "in a land flowing with milk and honey." He sets himself to answer the question, why the people have nothing to eat. Because they have no work. Why have they no work? Because manufacturers cannot find vent for their goods. Why is this? Because food is so dear that people cannot afford to buy anything else. He then sets himself to answer the question why food is so dear. Corn—because such immense quantities are consumed by distilling. To the objec-

## John Wesley

tion that the King's revenue depends on the taxation of spirits, Wesley replies, "Oh, tell it not in Constantinople, that the English raise the royal revenue by selling the flesh and blood of their countrymen." Why are oats dear? Because gentlemen keep four times as many horses as formerly. Pork, poultry, and eggs? The wrong here is the monopolising of farms. Luxury, he contends, is the great cause of scarcity—the luxury of the rich.

What are the remedies? Prohibit distilling; put a heavier taxation on horses and gentlemen's carriages; let no farm at a higher rental than one hundred pounds a year; repress luxury of all kinds. This pamphlet is mentioned at some length to show that Wesley felt keenly the poverty of the suffering poor, and was not wanting in suggestions for its alleviation.

He himself did what he could. Reference has already been made to his medical dispensaries, where free treatment was given to the poor. He appointed visitors to the sick. As far as it was possible he found employment for the unemployed, both men and women. In times of acute distress he helped them with food and clothes. He instituted a loan fund, founded a widows' and orphans' home; cared for every part of the people's lives. Surely in all this he was much in advance of his age, and realised to the full those pressing obligations of faith which Christian people to-day are only just beginning to think about.

His voice was raised against every kind of injustice. His was among the first to speak in England against the liquor traffic, and ironical though it seems, his scathing words are not less needed to-day than then. "We must not sell anything which tends to impair health. Such is eminently all the liquid fire commonly called drams or spirituous liquors. It is true these may have

## Preacher, Writer, and Reformer

a place in medicine, they may be of use in some disorders, though there would rarely be occasion for them were it not for the unskilfulness of the practitioner. Therefore such as prepare and sell them only for this end may keep their conscience clear. But who are they? Who prepare them only for this end? Do you know ten such distillers in England? Then excuse these. But all who sell them in the common way, to any who will buy are poisoners general. They murder his Majesty's subjects by wholesale. Neither does their eye pity or spare. They drive them to hell like sheep. And what is their gain? Is it not the blood of these men? Who then would envy their large estates and sumptuous palaces? A curse is in the midst of them. The curse of God cleaves to the stones, the timber, the furniture of them! The curse of God is in their gardens, their walks, their graves: a fire that burns to the nethermost hell."

## CHAPTER XV

### TEACHING AND CHURCHMANSHIP

"If you were to ask me what great idea had John Wesley revealed had he preached, had he made articulate in the religion of his day, I would say it signified conversion—conversion of the soul to God. . . . He made it, he articulated it, he expressed the value of the soul before the ever living God."

PRINCIPAL FAIRBAIRN.

MR. GLADSTONE once described the Evangelical movement as "a strong, systematic, outspoken and determined reaction against the prevailing standards both of life and preaching. It aimed at bringing back on a large scale, and by an aggressive movement, the Cross, and all that the Cross essentially implies, both in the teaching of the clergy, and into the lives as well of the clergy as of the laity." How was this done? Certainly not by any new doctrine. This Wesley insisted upon again and again. He preached nothing but the "common fundamental principles of Christianity." In 1739 he writes: "I simply described the plain, old religion of the Church of England, which is now almost everywhere spoken against under the new name of Methodism." And again, five years later, "You are a member of the Church of England? Are you? Then the controversy is at an end." And a year later, "But I have greater authority, and such as I reverence only less than the oracles of God; I mean that of our own Church." What Wesley did do was to give to



# Teaching and Churchmanship

these great truths a clearness, distinctness, and power that had been lost. He made them a living thing. It was the old story, but the old story told with a freshness and life which drew men irresistibly under its spell.

"Our main doctrines, which include all the rest," says he, "are three—that of repentance, of faith, and of holiness. The first of these we account, as it were, the porch of religion; the next, the door; the third, religion itself." These three great doctrines were ever present in all his preaching and writing. "We see on every side," he said, "either men of no religion at all, or men of a lifeless, formal religion. We are grieved at the sight; and should greatly rejoice if by any means we might convince some that there is a better religion to be attained—a religion worthy of God that gave it."

Defining religion, Wesley insists that orthodoxy, or right opinions, are at least but a very slender part of it, if they can be allowed to be any part of it at all. Neither does it consist in negatives, in bare harmlessness of any kind; nor merely in externals, in doing good, or using the means of grace, in works of piety (so called) or of charity. Religion is nothing short of, or different from, "the mind that was in Christ;" the image of God stamped upon the heart, inward righteousness, attended with the peace of God; and "joy in the Holy Ghost." We conceive it, he says, to be "no other than love, the love of God and of all mankind; the loving God with all our heart and soul and strength, as having first loved *us*, as the fountain of all the good we have received, of all we ever hope to enjoy; and the loving every soul which God hath made, every man on earth as our own soul. This love we believe to be the medicine of life, the never-failing remedy for all the evils of a disordered world, for all the miseries and vices of men."

## John Wesley

The only way under heaven to attain to this religion is to repent and believe the Gospel ; or (as the Apostle words it) "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." By this faith, "he that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, is justified freely by His grace, through the redemption which is in Jesus Christ." True Christian saving faith implies abundantly more than an assent to Christ's Gospel ; it is a complete repose in the blood of Christ, a trust in the merits of His life, death, and resurrection ; a coming to Him as our expiatory Sacrifice and our Life, who gave Himself for us, and lives in us. It is "a sure trust and confidence which a man hath in God, that by the merits of Christ his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favour of God." Then "being justified by faith," men taste of the heaven to which they are going ; they are holy and happy ; they tread down sin and fear, and "sit in heavenly places with Christ Jesus." There is a humbleness of mind, gentleness, long-suffering, the whole image of God, and at the same time a peace that passeth all understanding, and joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Wesley taught that sanctification begins in the soul at the moment of justification. In thought, but not in fact, faith, holiness, justification were separable. "The moment we are justified by the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Jesus, we are also born of the spirit ; but in order of thinking justification precedes sanctification. We first conceive His wrath to be turned away, and then His spirit to work on our hearts. Justification implies only a relative, the new birth a real change. God in justifying us, 'does something *for* us ; in begetting us again, He does the work *in* us. By justification, instead of enemies we become

# Teaching and Churchmanship

children ; by sanctification, instead of sinners we become saints. The first restores us to the favour, the other to the image of God. Justification, in short, is equivalent to pardon, and the very moment we are justified sanctification begins. In that instant we are born again.'

"The witness of the Spirit and Christian perfection were other doctrines which held an important place in Wesley's theology. As we have already observed, he entirely rejected the Calvinistic doctrine. He believed that Christ died for all, and that 'all may recover through the second Adam whatsoever they have lost through the first, and that no child of man perishes except by his own fault.'"

Wesley never lost his love for the Church of England, and again and again expressed the desire that the Methodists should never leave it. He went so far as to say that when the Methodists left the Church of England, God would leave them. The glory of the Methodists was not to be a separate body, and none who regarded his judgment or advice would separate. The year before his death he wrote: "I never had any design of separating from the Church ; I have no such design now ; I do not believe the Methodists in general design it. I do, and will do, all that is in my power to prevent such an event ; nevertheless, in spite of all I can do, many will separate from it ; although I am inclined to think not one-half, perhaps not a third of them. These will be so bold and injudicious as to form a separate party, which consequently will dwindle into a dry, dull, separate party. In flat opposition to these, I declare, once more, that I live and die a member of the Church of England, and that none who regard my judgment or advice will ever separate from it."

## John Wesley

What are we to make of these statements? On the face of them they are clear enough. They are often quoted in High Church pamphlets and newspapers against the existence of Methodism as a Church, and appear as they stand very plausible arguments. But there are other considerations which put an entirely different light on the oft debated subject as to whether Wesley intended the creation of a church.

It must be remembered that the very time of his writing these strong words against separation, Wesley was doing things which practically made continued union with the Church of England an *impossibility*. We have seen that in 1784 he took the utmost precaution to secure the continuance of Methodism by enrolling in Chancery a Deed Poll, which gave a legal constitution to the Conference, as the governing body of Methodism. We have also seen that in the same year he ordained preachers for America, and later for Scotland and England, and how distressed his brother Charles was at the step taken. Lord Mansfield had said that ordination was separation, and Charles himself looked at it as the breaking of the bridge between Methodism and the Church of England. The least that can be said of all this is, that Wesley must have been very blind if he did not see to what his actions would ultimately lead. They made Methodism within the Establishment an *impossibility*, and practically created it a separate Church.

## CHAPTER XVI

### OLD AGE AND DEATH

"Now the labourer's task is o'er,  
Now the battle day is past ;  
Now upon the farther shore  
Lands the voyager at last.  
Father, in Thy gracious keeping  
Leave we now Thy servant sleeping."—ELLERTON.

THERE is no more fascinating picture in religious biography than that of Wesley in old age. At a time when most men lay down their weapons, and step out of the active ranks, he was still in the thick of the fray, travelling, preaching—working just as though he had been a young man. And, indeed, according to his own testimony, he was young—young at eighty years of age! "On the 28th of last June," he writes, "I finished my eightieth year. When I was young I had weak eyes, trembling hands, and abundance of infirmities. But by the blessing of God, I have outlived them all. I have no infirmities now, but what I judge to be inseparable from flesh and blood." He declares that he is as strong at eighty-one as he was at twenty-one; "but abundantly more healthy, being a stranger to the headache, toothache, and other bodily disorders which attended me in my youth." On completing his eighty-second year, he records that it is eleven years since he felt any such thing as "weariness"; he is "perfectly easy from head to foot." The next year he writes: "I am a wonder to myself, I am never tired. (Such is the goodness of God.)"

## John Wesley

There was a sense in which he had now come to his own. His days of persecution were over; he was no longer surrounded by angry, shouting mobs, but everywhere received with the utmost reverence and honour. He himself was astonished at the change. "I am become, I know not how, an honourable man. The scandal of the Cross is ceased; and all the kingdom, rich and poor, Papists and Protestants, behave with courtesy—nay, with seeming goodwill." This was written in 1785 about Ireland, but it was the same everywhere. The opposition of Churchmen had almost died away, and the clergy, who had once shut their pulpits against him, now opened them on every hand, and crowded to hear him preach. High Church dignitaries and great men did him honour; and the Methodists themselves regarded him, if possible, with even greater veneration and love.

The journal affords some striking illustrations of this; never did Wesley have larger or more attentive congregations. In 1789 he paid his last visit to Cornwall. At Falmouth he recalls that the last time he was there was forty years ago, when he was taken prisoner by an immense mob, which gaped and roared like lions. "But how is the tide turned!" he writes. "High and low now lined the streets from one end of the town to the other, out of stark love and kindness, gaping and staring as if the king were going by." At night he preached to the largest congregation he had ever seen in Cornwall, except in or near Redruth. "And such a time I have not known before, since I returned from Ireland. God moved wonderfully on the hearts of the people, who all seem to know the day of their visitation." It was the same everywhere. At Helston he preached to "the largest and most serious congregation" which he had ever seen there. At



JOHN WESLEY PREACHING IN GWENNAP PIT



## John Wesley

Newlyn, Penzance, and Redruth there were immense crowds. "I know not," he says, "that I ever spent such a week in Cornwall." At the Gwennap Amphitheatre he had a congregation of more than twenty-five thousand. At St. Ives "wellnigh the whole town attended, and with all possible seriousness." It was the same at Port Isaac. "How changed," he writes, "since the time when he that invited me durst not take me in, for fear his house should be pulled down."

Wesley again and again remarks on this change in the attitude of the people. After preaching at Todmorden he writes: "How changed are both the place and the people since I saw them first! 'So the smiling fields are glad, and the human savages are tame!'" At Barnsley he was amazed at the transformation. "Formerly it was famous for all manner of wickedness; they were then ready to tear any Methodist preacher in pieces; now not a dog wagged his tongue." Visiting Castle Carey he writes: "The first of our preachers that came hither the zealous mob threw into the horse-pond; now high and low earnestly listen to the Word that is able to save their souls." The year before he died he visited Norwich. "How wonderfully is the tide turned. I am become an honourable man at Norwich. God has at length made our enemies to be at peace with us." At Lynn all the clergymen in the town attended his preaching, except one who was lame. "They are all prejudiced in favour of the Methodists," he writes, "as indeed are most of the townspeople."

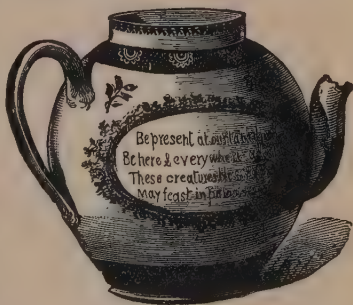
It was not until Wesley was eighty-five that he began to acknowledge any symptoms of old age. He says he has suffered little by "the rush of numerous years," but is bound to admit that he is not so agile as formerly! He cannot run or walk as fast as he did;

## Old Age and Death

his sight is a little decayed; his left eye dim, hardly serving him to read. He has daily some pain in the ball of his right eye, as also in his right temple (occasioned by a blow received some months since); also in his right shoulder and arm, which he imputes partly to a sprain, and partly to rheumatism. He finds some decay in his memory, especially with regard to names and things lately passed; but not at all with regard to things read and heard twenty, forty, or sixty years; neither does he find any decay in his hearing, smell, taste, or appetite, though he wants but a third part of the food he did once. He still says he finds no such thing as weariness, either in travelling, or preaching. He is not conscious of any decay in writing sermons, which he does as readily, and he believes as correctly, as ever. This is a rosy picture, and perhaps slightly overdrawn, for old age is slow to see the changes wrought by advancing years.

When eighty-six this wonderful man is bound to acknowledge that he has grown old! "I now find," he says, "I grow old." His sight, strength, memory are all decayed. "What I should be afraid of is, if I took thought for the morrow, that my body should weigh down my mind, and create either stubbornness by the decrease of my understanding, or peevishness by the increase of bodily infirmities; but Thou shalt answer for me, O Lord my God."

On New Year's Day, 1790, he makes the following



WESLEY'S TEA-POT

# John Wesley

pathetic entry in his journal :—"I am now an old man, decayed from head to foot. My eyes are dim; my right hand shakes much; my mouth is hot and dry every morning; I have a lingering fever almost every day; my motion is weak and slow. However, blessed be God, I do not slack my labour; I can preach and

write still." No wonder that Henry Moore, who knew Wesley well, tells us that during the last years of his life he was "a wonder to many."

It was about this time that Henry Crabbe Robinson heard Wesley preach at Colchester. The scene as described in his diary is touching and full of interest. It was in October, 1790, four months before Wesley's death. "He stood in a wide pulpit, and on each side of him stood a minister, and the two held him up, having their hands under his armpits. His feeble voice was barely audible, but his reverend countenance, especially his long white locks, formed a picture never to be forgotten. There was a vast crowd of lovers and admirers. It was for the most part a pantomime, but the pantomime went to the heart. Of the kind I never saw anything

comparable to it in after-life."

Crabbe, the poet, heard him preach a little while after this at Lowestoft. Wesley was again supported in the pulpit. The poet was not only struck by the preacher's venerable appearance and cheerful air, but especially by the way in which he quoted some lines from Anacreon with an application to



WESLEY'S CLOCK

## Old Age and Death

himself, and the beautiful cadence he gave to the words—

“Oft am I by women told,  
‘Poor Anacreon ! Thou growest old ;  
See, thine hairs are falling all ;  
Poor Anacreon ! How they fall !’  
Whether I grow old or no,  
By these signs I do not know ;  
But this I need not to be told,  
’Tis time to *live*, if I grow old.”

“In these last days,” says Dr. Rigg, “people gazed on Wesley with veneration as he passed through the streets. He returned their friendly greetings in the words of his favourite apostle, ‘Little children, love one another.’ At every place he visited he gave the Society his last advice ‘to love as brethren ; fear God, and honour the King.’ He generally closed these touching services with the verse which he gave out so often in the family circle at the preacher’s house in City Road—

“‘Oh that without a lingering groan,  
I may the welcome word receive,  
My body with my charge lay down,  
And cease at once to work and live.’”

On 7th October, 1790, the veteran was at Winchelsea, where he preached for the last time in the open air. He stood under an ash tree in the churchyard, surrounded by most of the inhabitants of the town. He was still preaching repentance: “The kingdom of heaven is at hand ; repent and believe the Gospel.” There was the same power to move men’s hearts: “The tears of the people,” says one who was present, “flowed in torrents.” He

“Preached as never sure to preach again  
And as a dying man to dying men.”

The last entry made in his journal was on Sunday,



# John Wesley

24th October, when he conducted services in Spitalfields Church, and St. Paul's, Shadwell. The rest of the year was doubtless spent in what Wesley called his "little journeys" into Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire, Herefordshire, and Kent.

On 1st February of the following year he wrote his last letter to America. This was his dying message to the transatlantic Methodists. "Lose no opportunity of declaring to all men that the Methodists are one people in all the world, and that it is their full determination so to continue—

"Though mountains rise and oceans roll,  
To sever us in vain."

A few days later he was eagerly planning fresh travels, and fully intended to go north in March. He actually sent his chaise and horses before him to Bristol, and took places for himself and friends in the Bath coach. On Thursday, 17th February, he preached at Lambeth, but on his return home seemed unwell, and thought he had taken cold. However, the next day he preached at Chelsea, but had to pause several times because of his failing voice. On Saturday he was still unwell, but continued his reading and writing. He was quite unable to preach on the Sunday, and slept for many hours. The next day he seemed better, and on the Tuesday preached at City Road, and the next day at Leatherhead. This was his last sermon; the veteran had spent his strength and made his final call.

On Thursday he visited a trusted friend at Balham, returning the next day to City Road. It was now evident to everybody that he was extremely ill, and that his last days were drawing near. Dr. Whitehead was sent for. On his entering the room, the sick man smiled and said in a cheerful voice, "Doctor, they are more afraid than hurt." He lay most of that day and the





THE DEATHBED OF JOHN WESLEY

## John Wesley

next with a quick pulse and burning fever. On Sunday he seemed a little better, and talked to the friends gathered round him. On Monday, however, the weakness increased; he slept most of the day, and spoke but little. Once in a low but distinct voice he said, "There is no way into the holiest but by the blood of Jesus." Asked the next day whether he was in pain, he answered "No," and then broke into singing—

"All glory to God in the sky,  
And peace upon earth be restored."

He sang two verses, and then his strength failed. After a while he asked for pen and ink, but was too weak to use them. Someone present said, "Let me write for you, sir; tell me what you would say." "Nothing," was the reply, "but that God is with us."

In the afternoon the dying man seemed to rally a little, and said he would get up. While they were getting ready his clothes, he broke out singing with such vigour that everyone in the room was astonished—

"I'll praise my Maker while I've breath,  
And when my voice is lost in death,  
Praise shall employ my nobler powers;  
My days of praise shall ne'er be past  
While life and thought and being last,  
Or immortality endures."

When his friends helped him into a chair, he tried again to sing—

"To Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,  
Who sweetly all agree——"

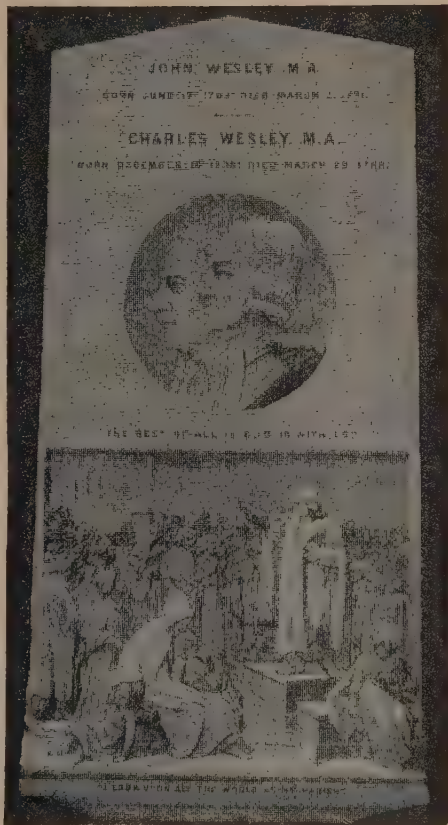
But his voice failed, and he seemed to change for death. Gasping for breath, he said, "Now we have done, let us all go." He was laid on the bed, and after sleeping a while, bade those around him pray and praise. Later, when others entered the room, he tried to speak, but none could understand what he desired to say.

## Old Age and Death

Then he paused a little, and with all the remaining strength he had, cried out, "The best of all is God is with us." "Then lifting up his dying arm in token of victory, and raising his feeble voice with a holy triumph not to be expressed, again repeated the heart-reviving words, 'The best of all is God is with us.'" Most of the night following he was heard attempting to repeat the forty-sixth Psalm, but life was fast ebbing away.

A few minutes before ten o'clock on Wednesday, 2nd March, 1791, this faithful servant of Christ passed to his reward. One who was present throughout the last scene wrote:

"The solemnity of the dying hour of that great and good man, I believe, will ever be written on my heart. A cloud of the Divine presence rested on all;



THE TABLET TO THE WESLEYS IN  
WESTMINSTER ABBEY

# John Wesley

and while he could hardly be said to be an inhabitant of earth, being now speechless, and his eyes fixed, victory and glory were written on his countenance, and quivering, as it were, on his dying lips. No language can paint what appeared in that face! The more we gazed upon it, the more we saw of heaven unspeakable."

He was buried on Wednesday, 9th March. "I particularly desire," he had said, "that there be no hearse, no coach, no escutcheon, no pomp except the tears of them that loved me." There were indeed the tears of those who loved him. When the Rev. John Richardson, who read the funeral service, came to the words, "Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God to take unto Himself the soul of our dear brother here departed," he substituted the words "our dear father here departed," and the silent tears of the vast multitude gave way to violent sobs, for they all loved him, and felt that they had indeed lost their father in God.

His body was borne to the grave by six poor men, fitting enough for one who had said that if he died worth more than ten pounds men might call him a vagabond and a thief.

"God buries His workmen, but carries on His work." To-day the adherents of Methodism number over thirty millions of people. And this, the "least part" of the work Wesley accomplished! It has been truly said, that only the supremely great stand the test of time. The name of Wesley will stand for all time. Such a life as his is indestructible.

"How can he be dead  
Who lives immortal in the hearts of men?"







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Walters, Arthur.  
John Wesley / by Arthur Walters.  
London : S. W. Partridge, [1909?]  
159 p. : ill., ports. ; 20 cm.

1. Wesley, John, 1703-1791. 2.  
Methodists--England--Biography. 3  
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